

INSIDE THE MINDS OF MALAYSIAN WORLD  
PASTRY CHEFS:  
PORTRAITS OF CULINARY CREATIVITY

By

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My interests, apart from food, revolve around basketball and the graphic novels of *Batman*. As much as I try to isolate myself both literally and figuratively to mirror the likes of the *Caped Crusader*, I noticed that the Batman is never truly alone. He always had help, regardless whether it was *Alfred*, *Robin*, the *Justice League* or even *the Joker*. *Batman* is never alone. This section is dedicated to the many members of my *Bat-Family*, who are near and dear to me in my pursuit for greater knowledge through this project.

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Abstract: Retaining quality chefs has long been an issue in the culinary industry. Existing literature insists that practitioners should enhance work environments to support and foster chefs' creativity. However, the core issue of how chefs manifest creativity remains unclear. This study focuses on elucidating the nature of pastry chefs' (an underrepresented category of the culinary profession) culinary creativity through a phenomenological approach. Nine extraordinary pastry chefs who have represented the Malaysian Pastry Team in the prestigious World Pastry Cup were sampled, in which in-depth interviews and several material artifacts were collected to explicate the essences of culinary creativity. The data analysis was conducted in two phases: the first was to capture the individual essences of each pastry chef's creative experiences; and the second was to categorize and group each individual essence into themes that best encapsulate Malaysian World pastry chefs' creative experiences. Portraiture was used as a vessel to help portray each chef's unique experiences, which led to nine distinct yet rich "portraits of creativity" being portrayed. This was then followed by a phenomenological analysis to help group each essence together into four unique themes – (1) creative harmony, (2) the poetics of creative space, (3) the duality of creative identity, and lastly (4) imaginative episodes. In essence, this study contributes to three avenues. First, this study provides empirical support that culinary creativity is not one that is governed by a sequential/linear process, but rather a patient endeavor of incubation and fueled by continual inspirations. Second, this study enhances current literature on chefs' occupational rhetorics particularly from the viewpoint of an artist, as it is informed by a contradictory, yet inseparable personification of a scientist. This brings to consideration that there is much to consider about the science behind the making of art, and the art in the development of science. Lastly, through the usage of portraiture, this study gained a greater understanding to how chefs experience creativity through several instances of imaginative episodes, which extends and overlaps with the theory of flow.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Unravelling the mysteries behind chefs' culinary creativity is regarded as a great source of enjoyment and pleasure for viewers of television, print and advertising (Powell & Prasad, 2010). The creative processes that go on in the mind of a chef have received great academic attention since the dawn of the new millennium (e.g., Horng & Hu, 2008; Stierand & Dörfler, 2012). But what is creativity? Creativity has long been coined as a fuzzy concept (Markusen, 1999) and has been pride as an important skillset across various fields and domains (National Center on Education the Economy, 2007). To psychologists, creativity is regarded as the highest expressions of self-actualization. To educators, it is the highest form of learning. To business executives, it is considered the most critical survival skillset in the twenty-first century (Florida, 2012; Pink, 2005). To chefs in particular, it is considered the pinnacle of work itself, resembling an embodied experience with an ultimate goal of not only satisfying consumers, but also advancing culinary knowledge (Stierand, Dörfler, & MacBryde, 2014).

This study focuses on uncovering the underlying experiences of culinary creativity from an underrepresented branch of the culinary profession – pastry chefs (Ferguson & Zukin, 1998;

Leschziner, 2015). I adopted a qualitative approach in hopes to narrate, discuss, and portray the various nuances and descriptions of culinary creativity as experienced by some of Asia's finest creators in the field of *pâtisserie*. As an opening chapter, I briefly depict culinary creativity as a fertile field of worthy of scholastic explorations, followed by problems associated to the culinary profession, before finally arriving to the purpose of the study.

### Culinary Creativity as a Form of Artistic Creativity

The most widely accepted definition of creativity is the production of new and unique ideas that is both useful and appropriate to a given situation (Kaufman, 2016). On this note, the fields of sciences and arts are amongst the most popular domains to receive scholastic emphasis in creativity studies (Nelson, 2005). Both fields have showcased that creativity in both realms are different in terms of characteristics and features, such as cognitive disposition (Perrine & Brodersen, 2005), personality traits (Feist, 1998), general nature, and also purpose in general (Charyton & Snelbecker, 2007; Torrance, 1988). To clarify the true point of delineation, Simonton (cited in Kersting, 2003) in particular distinguishes that scientific creativity is restricted within the boundaries of scientific processes, while artistic creativity on the other hand, are less restrictive and free roaming. This absence in constraint allows people engaged artistic creativity to externalize something of himself or herself through different forms of arts freely (e.g., painting, dancing), which resembles a powerful tool that fosters emotional intelligence and creativity in professional life (Ivcevic, Hoffmann, & Brackett, 2014).

Using Simonton's logic, this study takes upon the viewpoint that chefs' manifestation of culinary creativity is a form of artistic creativity rather than one of scientific in nature. Although some branches of literature may suggest otherwise (Borkenhagen, 2017; Carson, Peterson, & Higgins, 2005), this study takes upon the stance that chefs' creative processes reflect one of an

embodied experience, fueled with artistic activities (see Julmi & Scherm, 2015). Henceforth, the present study defines culinary creativity as the production of ideas that resembles self-expressions of the chefs' inner states that reflects their personality, knowledge, skills and experience (Hornig & Lee, 2007). Despite several scholars taking a unique interest in unravelling this phenomenon (e.g., Leschziner, 2015; Stierand & Dörfler, 2012; Stierand et al., 2014), very few have explicitly make a stance in arguing its uniqueness especially in its relations to of artistic activities. In light of this, the core question: "what makes culinary creativity distinct from other forms of artistic creativity?" remains unanswered. Drawing literature from the sociology of chefs, culinary creativity, and artistic creativity in general, the following subsection addresses some key points to why culinary creativity is a distinct phenomenon that deserves to be studied as a field of its own.

### *The Uniqueness of culinary creativity*

Firstly, food (the output of culinary creativity) is one of the few forms of art that we actually internalize into our bodies. Unlike other forms of art which stimulates our senses and/or emotions, food is arguable the only form of art that we actually consume internally as a nourishment that serves as a basic sustenance for human survival. This brings greater complications to the creative process as it not only takes into consideration food safety and handling procedures, but also adequate knowledge on executing preparation techniques in ensuring food quality dimensions. Secondly, in comparison with other forms of art such as paintings that stimulate our sights through colors and textures, or music through the sounds of melodies; food is the only form of art that engages all five senses of the human sensory system in which taste (e.g., saltiness, sourness etc.), sight (e.g., presentation), smell (e.g., aromas), touch (e.g., textures), and also hearing (e.g., sound of a crunch) are all accounted for. In addition, Page (2017) specifically labels the food preparation to a complex phenomenon that encompasses many



underlying factors, the most unique of them all, is the engagement of sensorial qualities of a human's mind and soul. In particular, while food possesses the unique potential to amplify emotional impacts upon consumers when consumed (McBride, 2010; Myhrvold, 2011; Page & Dornenburg, 2008); the crafting of food itself too is one of many emotions to the creator. This wondrous phenomenon albeit less looked upon by scholars, carries much hidden meanings when studied immensely. Haas (2005) for example, poetically exclaimed that chefs in a way are playing gods, as they have absolute 'control of intimacy – controlling what people put into their bodies... if the food fails, the intimacy is also a failure... [it is a] narcissistic impulse and strategy of using food as an extension of [the] self.' (p. 42). Others have compared cooking to an euphonious activity, that have the haunting ability to bring back memories of the past and communicate with the present, all within rhythmical gestures that are best described as 'expressions' in a kitchen space (Duruz, 2004).

In addition, unlike other forms of artistic creativity which often deals with one or very few 'ingredients' (e.g., a sculptor who only works with clay), culinary creativity involves a myriad of ingredients and also preparation techniques. Not only that, but it also heavily depends on the creator's ability to 'harmonize' them in way that is meaningful and socially adequate for guests (Stierand & Dörfler, 2012). Lastly, food products are highly ephemeral and are best consumed at its optimal time and temperature. Dissimilar to other ephemeral artworks like street paints that would be washed away after a rainstorm or performing arts (i.e., dancing), these forms of art can be filmed or photographed. Food on the other hand, has to be experienced and consumed at the point of its optimal time and temperature (Page, 2017). Although some may argue that the food can be easily replicable through the form of uniformed recipes, the human touch in food preparation plays an imperative role, which provides heterogeneity in every meal. In other words, not every performance is the same. Of course, this disregards the inclusion of tools and

machinery that automates and ‘deskills’ the culinary preparation process, as it eliminates the artistic creativity aspect of culinary arts (Robinson & Barron, 2007).

In spite of culinary creativity’s uniqueness, existing literature constrained culinary innovations and their creative process to a slender view that ignores its artistic nature (e.g., Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007, 2008, 2009); whilst some encases the culinary creativity to follow strict stages/phases, which suggest that creativity functions in a linear and sequential process (Horng & Hu, 2008, 2009). Stierand and Lynch (2008), for instance, debated that these studies not only conceptualized the term narrowly, but also fixated culinary innovation within the constricted scope of goods and services, which creates ‘a poor language with a terminology that just helps streamline the strategic planning and production of culinary creations’ (p. 339). Given that the artistic realm is best known as the zenith of work itself (Fine, 1996), there is an essential need to rethink the artistic role of chefs (e.g., Horng & Lee, 2007; Mac Con Iomaire, 2014; Stierand & Lynch, 2008). All in which points towards a need in which this study aims to capitalize on.

### Problem Statement

The chef profession has in retrospect, resembled a job that of low-prestige, low-pay and filled with unattractive work conditions (Ghiselli, La Lopa, & Bai, 2001; Pratten, 2003). It has also, in many respects, been struggling with negative connotations in society, such as it resembling a stressful environment (Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007) with a high tendency for abusive behaviors to manifest (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Johns & Menzel, 1999), filled with mundane and repetitive work tasks (Lee-Ross, 1999; Robinson, Solnet, & Breakey, 2014), and even gender inequality (Harris & Giuffre, 2010). Nevertheless, the nature of the job has increasingly become more respectable in today’s society, which some argue that it is attributed by celebrity chef

figures and entertainment media influences (Borchgrevink, Nelson, & Ruf, 1998; Pietro, 2016; Robinson, 2013). Despite this positive uplifting of the chef profession, it however generates a distorted public perception that is not reflective of the occupational reality. This insofar creates a false image that may result in preconceived perceptions and assumptions for entry-level culinarians to undertake their career path as a chef (Robinson, 2013).

The connotations above give reason to why retaining quality chefs across various contexts remains a prominent issue (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2010; Chuang & Lei, 2011; Pratten, 2003; Pratten & O'Leary; Robinson & Beesley, 2010; Robinson et al., 2014; Wang, Horng, Cheng, & Killman, 2011). In line with this, scholars have repeatedly suggested that promoting the manifestation of creativity would help make amends in the retention of quality chefs (Robinson & Beesley, 2010; Robinson et al., 2014; Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). For example, Tongchaiprasita and Ariyabuddhiphongsb (2016) have noted that if chefs are granted the freedom to practice creativity, it would lead to the greater job satisfaction. Other studies have included that creativity, if not allowed to roam and perambulate, would be detrimental to their subjective wellbeing as well as their organizational and occupational commitment (Ariza-Montes, Arjona-Fuentes, Han, & Law, 2018; Robinson et al., 2014). Despite such studies insisting that practitioners should enhance work environments to support and foster chefs' creativity, the core issue remains a nebulousity, which is how chefs manifest creativity itself.

Existing scholastic attempts on culinary creativity emphasized on its predictions and antecedents (e.g., Horng & Lee, 2007; Horng & Lee, 2009; Stierand, 2015; Stierand & Lynch, 2008) and its consequences (e.g., Robinson & Beesley, 2010; Robinson et al., 2014). Others on the other hand studied culinary creativity in a frantic linear and sequential process framed by the theoretical lenses that they selectively adopt (e.g., Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2008). These works however, neglect the actual experience of creativity itself, which is not only a prominent gap in the culinary field, but also in creativity studies in general

(Nelson & Rawlings, 2007). In absence of such works, Sass (2000-2001) commented that “...there is a sense in which we literally do not know what we are talking about when we speak of creativity.” (p. 42). Reinforcing the issue, Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels’ (1971) stated that “despite much recent research on creativity, perhaps the most critical aspect of the problem has eluded systematic inquiry: the process of creative production itself” (p. 47).

To capitalize on this gap, the present study directs its focus in exploring chefs’ artistic creativity using a phenomenology approach. Deriving from the constructivist’s philosophical stance, the phenomenological approach reflects a qualitative exploration of a distinct phenomenon, in which the central concern is to explore the “embodied, experiential meanings aiming for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 6). The phenomenological approach is deemed most suitable for this study as it aims to illuminate aspects of a complex phenomenon (i.e., culinary creativity) by investigating the lifeworld of those who live it. The effectiveness of phenomenology studies in understanding artistic creativity has been showcased by Reinders (1992) as well as Nelson and Rawlings (2007), in which both studies sampled artists deriving from a multiplicity of disciplines (i.e., musicians, visual artists, writers etc.). Moreover, Stierand and Dörfler (2012) briefly depicted the phenomenology of European Michelin Star caliber chefs’ creative processes. However, there is still no known study to date that looks unequivocally into the artistic realm of chefs.

### Purpose Statement

Considering the many arguments as presented, this phenomenological study aims to explore the essences of artistic creativity through the lifeworld of Malaysian pastry chefs who are national flag-bearers in the prestigious World Pastry Cup. The principal aim is to capture how

these chefs experience the culinary creative process to explicate the essences and meanings of the phenomenon in chefs' lifeworld. Specifically, the following research questions were adopted:

RQ1. What are the essences of Malaysian pastry chefs' culinary creativity?

RQ2. How does culinary creativity compare to artistic creativity?

### Contributions of the Study

From a managerial standpoint, several studies have already cemented that the manifestation of creativity plays an essential role in the retention of chefs, and suggested that practitioners should enhance work environments to support and foster chefs' creativity (Robinson & Beesley, 2010; Robinson et al., 2014; Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). Nonetheless, the core issue of how chefs manifest creativity itself still remains a nebulosity. As the present study tackles the phenomenon of creativity of those who concretely lived it, there is a potential that this study would make certain aspects and features of culinary creativity accessible for managers. This could allow hospitality managers to create and design environments to support and foster the phenomenon more exclusively and effectively for chefs. Moreover, findings for this study can also serve as a basis and reference for future planning of culinary education. As creativity continues to rule as a survival skillset in today's economy and society (Florida, 2012; Pink, 2005), findings from this study may shed some light for culinary institutions providing them a possibility foster young chefs' creativity and cultivate a more creative mode of culinary thinking in future chefs.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study aims to add greater profundity to culinary creativity. Very few scholars explicitly make a stance in arguing its uniqueness, as existing studies has seemingly studied culinary creativity as a mere sub-branch of creativity literature. By tackling the phenomenon of culinary creativity from the viewpoints of chefs themselves, this

study hopes to add some much needed evidence to cement culinary creativity as an independent and distinct field for scholastic exploration.

### Definition of Key Terminologies

Prior to proceeding, it is important to define and clarify several key terms that would be traced throughout the project. Each terminology draws support from previous literature and modified for the pertinence for this study.

- *Creativity* - The production of new and unique ideas that are both useful and appropriate to a given situation (Kaufman, 2016).
- *Artistic Creativity* – The production of ideas that resembles self-expressions of a creator's inner states that reflects their personality, knowledge and experience (MacKinnon, 1962). This reflects that artistic creativity is a self-expression of ideas that has a means to itself, which is to satisfy the creator's sense of lack (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007).
- *Culinary Creativity* – This study takes upon the viewpoint that chefs' manifestation of culinary creativity is one of artistic creativity. Hence, it is defined as the production of ideas that resembles self-expressions of the chefs' inner states that reflects their personality, knowledge, skills and experience (Horng & Lee, 2007).
- *Innovation* – The outcome of creativity, which are the outputs and benefits from the initial creative ideas (Amabile, 1996).
- *Culinary Innovation* – The outcome of culinary creativity, which are the outputs and benefits from the initial culinary creative ideas, such as a finished dish or menu item (Amabile, 1996; Stierand et al., 2014).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with literature related to artistic creativity and culinary creativity alongside its respective processes. This will then be followed by a section describing an understanding of chefs as creative artists, and more particularly, the subclass of chefs that this study focuses upon on – Malaysian World Pastry Cup chefs.

#### Artistic Creativity the Artistic Creative Process

Creativity defies a precise definition. Torrance (1988) describes creativity as an encompassment of infinite meanings that is difficult to articulate and resemble a process of invisible unconsciousness. Likewise, Mumford and Gustafson (1988) described creativity as the production of novel ideas that serves a utilitarian value. Guilford (1986) on the other hand, referred to creativity as the ability to engage in divergent thinking, in which the emphasis is on the individual's ability to produce a variety of outputs deriving from a root source by considering viewpoints from various other disciplines. In light on this, the fields of sciences and arts are amongst the most popular domains to receive considerable scholastic emphasis in creativity

studies (Nelson, 2005). Both fields have shown to have different characteristics and features. For instance, Perrine and Brodersen (2005) found artistically and scientifically creative individuals differ in cognitive disposition. Artistically creative individuals possess the ability to handle multiple aesthetic conceptions and immerse oneself into fantasy; whilst scientifically creative individuals have the ability to grasp and form linkages between multiple competing ideas. In addition, Feist (1998) noted artistically creative individuals are prone to possess personality traits such as emotional instability, coldness and the tendency to reject group norms, all in which are not commonly found among scientifically creative individuals. These depictions show that creativity is peculiarly domain specific, especially between the fields of arts and sciences.

The focus in this study is the field of artistic creativity, which is most often described as the self-expressions of the a creators' inner states that reflects their personality, knowledge and experience (MacKinnon, 1962). Nelson (2005) states that artistic creativity draws greater social recognition compared to those of scientific creativity. This is because artistic creativity is often referred to expressions of artists' feelings and emotions, which resembles a powerful force that is able to keep observers fascinated to the point of obsession (Hospers, 1985). The creative process of artists has received a growing interest in scholastic attention, especially in modeling attempts associated with cognitive, affective, behavioral, and contextual factors in artwork production (Cawelti, Rappaport, & Wood, 1992; Glück, Ernst, & Unger, 2002; Jones, Runco, Dorman, & Freeland, 1997; Mace & Ward, 2002; Stohs, 1991). Other works have investigated the experiential process of artistic creativity among artist from different disciplines (Doyle, 1998; Nelson, 2005; Nelson & Rawlings; Reinders, 1992; Yokochi & Okada, 2005).

Amongst these studies, Nelson and Rawling's (2007) stood out discernably, as they rigorously explored the phenomenology of artistic creativity by questioning how artists experience their creative process. In particular, they have noted that artists engage in artistic creativity due to the discovery of a perceived sense of lack in his/her life. This creates a tension



forcing the artist to engage in a process of intuitive exploration to fulfil the perceived lack. Furthermore, findings showcased that the phenomenology of artistic creativity overlaps with a multiplicity of creativity theories. Among them included Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 1996) famed concept of 'flow', which is a hypnotic state that disengages oneself from his/her actual surroundings, allowing the individual to be totally absorbed into the present task and moment (Grove & Lewis, 1996). This was evident as the interviewed artists constantly referred to the notion of being 'in the zone', as they were able to submerge themselves into a state where the artistic creative experience becomes autotelic and intrinsically rewarding (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Artists who were 'flowing in the zone' were also found to be forcefully absorbed into their artwork's creative process, experience effortlessness in the technical aspects, undergo a spike in artistic confidence, and are intensely connected emotionally to the artwork's completion (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007). In addition, a prevalence of intense positive moods was also showcased during the execution of artistic works, in which they ultimately view their artwork as a journey of synthesizing positive affective states (e.g., joy, freedom etc.) (Jamison, 1989; Nelson & Rawlings, 2007). Not only that, the attitude of 'purposive-playfulness' was also widely found throughout both Nelson and Rawling's (2007) as well as Reinders' (1991) studies. This refers to the active manipulation of the artists' materials and ideas in a playful exploratory manner in attempts to materialize the artwork. This playful approach helps the artist discover new elements for the creative piece, which is often subjected to chance or accidental development (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007).

Conversely, there are two contrasting findings that eluded Nelson and Rawling's (2007) study from Reinders' (1992) work on the subject matter. These included the absence of 'circumscribed indeterminacy' and 'distant-engagement.' The former refers to the artist intentionally holding back past experiences or knowledge during the creative process, and instead, instill trust onto his/her own artistic intuition in recognizing emerging artistic patterns.

The latter on the other hand, denotes the artist's ability to take an alternative standpoint, by viewing artistic patterns and structures from an audience's perspective.

In summary, albeit limited, Nelson and Rawling's (2007) as well as Reinders' (1991) study were the closest depiction to understand the phenomenon of artistic creativity. Both works were able to expand and incorporate a mix of several theories as well such as those of Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow.' Nonetheless, the question remains whether chefs' go through similar experiences when engaged in their work of arts.

### Culinary Creativity and the Culinary Creative Process

Just as creativity, culinary creativity also defies a precise definition. Horng and Lee's (2007) study describes culinary creativity as a reflection of a chef's personally, knowledge and experience. Peng, Lin, and Baum (2013) describe the nature of culinary creativity as the outcome of interactions among its creators (chefs), organizations, and customers. In addition, Horng and Hu (2008) assert culinary creativity as a nonlinear and heterogeneous development process that combines domain-specific techniques, cultures, and historical periods. This study in particular, looks at culinary creativity from an artistic standpoint (Julmi & Scherm, 2015) and views chefs' creative process as an embodied experience, fueled with artistic activities. With that being said, this study proceeds with the definition of culinary creativity being the production of ideas that resembles self-expressions of the chefs' inner states that reflects their personality, knowledge, skills and experience (Horng & Lee, 2007), in which its output must be socially appropriate and accepted (Stierand et al., 2014).

Looking at existing definitions of artistic creativity and culinary creativity, much entanglement must be clarified. Artistic creativity is best referred to as "results in products that are clearly expressions of the creator's inner states, his needs, perceptions, motivations, and the

like” (MacKinnon, 1962, p. 485). This reflects that artistic creativity is a self-expression of ideas that has a means to itself, which is to satisfy the creator’s sense of lack (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007). At first glance, culinary creativity may appear to be a mere expansion of artistic creativity. Instead, it goes beyond just that especially when the role social appropriateness comes into play. Whilst artistic creativity in general aims to fulfil a ‘lack’ within an individual, which forms a purified self-reflection of its creators; culinary artists on the other hand extends this view, to one more complex in nature. Although elite chef’s creativity may be guided by his own sense of lack, they cannot however, roam freely with their inner states entirely. The social appropriateness dimension adds a layer of filtration that chefs has to be attentive to, ensuring that their outputs are still accepted by the general public, whilst still satisfying one’s inner needs (Stierand et al., 2014). For example, past studies noted that ‘harmony’ was essentially important when think about culinary innovations (Stierand & Dörfler, 2012), whereby ‘too much cannot be going on’ on the plate. Because some chefs are pressured by reputational status, they tend to desperately display dishes with unusual food stuff or ingredient combinations to signal creativity (Leschziner, 2015). And if there is ‘too much going on’ in a dish, harmony is compromised, resulting in an underdeveloped dish that is socially inappropriate for the restaurants’ customers. Experience serve as an intuitive rectification for this issue (Leschziner, 2015), as seasoned chefs tend to be wiser in terms of component selection, hence resulting greater results in harmony creation.

Spiking in popularity, culinary creativity has received considerable scholastic attention since the dawn of the new millennium. Existing studies on the matter focused on the drivers of culinary creativity (Albors-Garrigos, Barreto, García-Segovia, Martínez-Monzó, & Hervás-Oliver, 2013; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2009), the external factors that impacts the development of culinary creativity (Horng & Lee, 2009), the core competencies necessary for innovative culinary development (Hu, 2010), and the process of culinary creativity itself (Harrington, 2005; Horng & Hu, 2009; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007, 2008). Despite this spike in popularity,

Stierand and Lynch (2008) accused existing works on culinary creative process for comparing them to the likes of goods and services. For instance, Ottenbacher and Harrington (2007) asserted that the development process of Michelin-starred chefs' culinary innovation share similarities to conventional concepts of new product development. Although there are some exceptions such as the absence of the need to include a business analysis stage, as well as the inclusion of employees as an essential role in fine-dining restaurant settings; the role of the chefs intuitive and artistic aspirations remains neglected throughout the process (Stierand & Lynch, 2008).

With regards to the creative process, the work of Horng and Hu (2008) stood out, as they analyzed the culinary creative process according to Wallas' (1926) four-stage creative process model of idea preparation, idea incubation, idea development and evaluation of the outcome. The authors added some refinement to the four-stage model by incorporating the Geneplore model by Finke, Ward, and Smith (1992), which suggests that the creator would go through a generative phase and explorative phase repeatedly throughout Wallas' (1926) four stages. Whilst several creativity scholars have adopted Wallas' model to some success (e.g., Norlander & Gustafson, 1997, 1998), considerable criticism about the about the core basis of the model remains. Stierand et al. (2014) for one, questioned whether a process such as creativity and innovation could be bounded to a well-structured and sequential process. On this note, Stierand et al. (2014) did however, usefully uncovered the underlying difference between culinary creativity and innovations in haute cuisine. They asserted that culinary creativity reflects an embodied experience that is often channeled through chefs' intuition, whilst culinary innovation implies the process of social evaluation that is greatly dependent on perception, knowledge and value judgement of leading tastemakers in the restaurant industry (restaurant guides). Having stated, Stierand et al.'s (2014) study provides the closest depiction on chefs as a creative individual in the limited existing body of literature, as it states "the creative chef is advancing the knowledge

of the domain through their creations, while the engagement with the field is a commercial one through the dining experience of the customers.” (p. 24).

In addition, one of the key roots in chef’s culinary creativity is found embedded within master-apprentice relationships (Stierand, 2015; Stierand, Dörfler, & Lynch, 2008). These relationships serve as an essential career development phase for chefs (Bartholomew & Garey, 1996), and is commonly found across the chef discipline especially among those of European cultures (Guyette, 1981). Stierand (2015) notes that the master-apprentice relationship serves as an educational foundation for aspiring chefs, as they are exposed to the world of culinary creativity under the guidance of their creative heroes – the masters. Eventually, apprentices would soon develop the ability to distinguish different experiences, draw connections and create their own personas of creativity. However, Horng and Lee (2009) have suggested otherwise, as they have contemplated that the master-apprentice relationship may instead, serve as a constraint, as some mentors would ‘hold back a trick,’ which would hence limit aspiring culinary artists’ development. Nevertheless, it is arguable that this solely depends on the personality of the mentors, as devoted mentors with greater willingness to share may provide contrasting results.

Despite claims for the essentiality of creativity, Hu (2010) found that creativity was ranked the second least important core competency in chefs’ innovative culinary development. In a similar study done in Cyprus, it was also found that culinary creativity was the least importantly ranked competency (Zopiatis, 2010). Regardless of the perceived irrelevance of culinary creativity, Robinson and Beesley (2010) noted that creativity plays an essential role as it clearly relates to both organizational and occupational satisfaction. In addition, Wong and Ladkin (2008) hospitality professionals with higher levels of creativity are more intrinsically motivated in their work outputs.

## Chefs as Creative Artists

Once a mere necessity for survival, food has evolved to join the likes of fine arts, which engages our emotions just as images and other forms of artwork might (McBride, 2010; Myhrvold, 2011). Behind the ideation and creation of such works of art, we find none other than the chefs behind the kitchen doors, who resemble a profession that encompasses aspects of both artistic innovations and scientific knowledge (Zopiatis, 2010). Fine (1996) depicted that chefs have a propensity to analyze themselves along four rhetorical ideologies: a professional, a businessman, a manual laborer and more significantly for this study, an artist. The artistic rhetoric is best described as the zenith of work itself, providing individuals a linkage to the glamorous aspects of a profession. However it is often oppressed by other rhetorics especially amongst fine-dining stature chefs (Fine, 1996). Nonetheless, the introduction of chefs as artistic figures was most noticeably plotted in history by Ferran Adrià, who was the head chef of arguably the most revolutionary restaurant that had ever operated in culinary history – elBulli. To date, Chef Adrià is the only chef to participate in the 12th edition of Documenta in 2007, which is the most prestigious contemporary avant-garde art event held in Kassel, Germany (Domene, 2013). This iconic achievement not only revolutionized the chef profession in the eyes of the public, but also supports the view that chefs can truly be artists in nature.

The importance of studying chefs' creativity from an artistic standpoint descends from a growing body of literature that implies creative performance is domain specific (Baer, 1998; Kaufman & Baer, 2005). Conversely, scholars have debated that chefs typically cannot be considered as artists because of the limited shelf life of culinary creations (Horng & Hu, 2008; Peng et al., 2013). This assessment contradicts the very nature of artists such as performers and dancers who often create performance that require simultaneous art production and art consumption. In light of this, Ivcevic (2007) notes that artistic creativity can refer to both the creation of non-perishable works of art (e.g., paintings) as well as perishable products that are

ephemeral in nature (e.g., theatre or dance performances), which this thesis submits to include culinary products.

Moving forward, the domain of artistic creativity is selected due to several noteworthy reasons. Firstly, previous studies have indicated that the involvement in expressing art acts as a powerful tool that fosters emotional intelligence and creativity in professional life (Ivcevic et al., 2014). Secondly, given that creative artists (e.g., painters, sculptors etc.) are exemplary instances embedded historically in the field of creativity research, this study would hence benefit from a rich and thick background to compare results. Thirdly, scholars in creativity studies has emphasized that artistic creations are the definitive manifestations of the human capacity to create (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). Hence, by looking at chefs through an artistic lens, the present study potentially adds much needed understanding to today's limited body of knowledge surrounding the profession especially within the realm of creativity studies. In addition, the focus upon the artistic domain also meets Baer's (1998) suggestion, who contemplated that domain specificity would yield richer and more useful results as opposed to examining creativity in general.

### 'Extraordinary' Pastry Chefs as Artistic Figures

In this study's quest to uncover the nature of chefs' artistic creativity, it is essential that the present thesis project investigate the most representative group of chefs in respects of their artistic creativeness. Hereafter, this study looks towards the notion of investigating "the extraordinary" which refers to individuals who are self-actualizing (motivated towards self-fulfillment), and possess the potential to break conventional structures and create new domains or alter existing ones (Stierand & Dörfler, 2012). Built off from the ideas from several noteworthy scholars (i.e., Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993, 1995, 1997; Maslow, 1970, 1971;

Nakamura, Shernoff, & Hooker, 2009), it is contemplated that only by investigating extraordinary individuals, or outliers, would we better understand the complex phenomenon of creativity (Dörfler & Stierand, 2009). Maslow (1971) explains this logic by stating:

*If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a “good sample” of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do. (p. 7)*

In light of this, Stierand and Dörfler (2012) stipulated “extraordinary chefs” as those who have achieved elite statuses awarded by the most renowned gatekeeper in the culinary domain – the Michelin Guide. The Michelin Guide reckons as the most authoritative and widely referred to restaurant guide in the world (Stierand & Lynch, 2008; Surlemont & Johnson, 2005; Svejenova, Mazza, & Planellas, 2007) that its influence has shown to affect chefs’ reputation, their associated business, as well as their professional careers in entirety (Lane, 2013; Surlemont & Johnson, 2005). However, the Michelin Guide is not one without its fair share of criticism. For one, many has accused the Michelin Guide inspectors and their reviews of providing a biased judgement on the supremacy of haute cuisine and French gastronomy (Gill, 2012; Lane, 2013). This brings up a biasness towards Eurocentric flavors and preferences. As Lane (2013) expresses: “...the long French culinary tradition and the continued supremacy of France on the European culinary cultural scene are seen to get in the way of objective and disinterested procedures of evaluation.” (p. 362). Moreover, the Michelin Star status has also been contemplated as a ‘curse’ in the industry (Kashner, 2015). To understand this issue’s extent, one does not need to look further than the suicide of Chef Bernard Loiseau in 2003, who took his own life after speculation that the Michelin Guide authorities were about to demote his restaurant from a three-star status (Paris & Leroy, 2014; Steinberger, 2016). Although, the unfortunate passing of Chef Loiseau is of an extreme, several renowned chefs have also seen to turn down Michelin Star awards, as the pressure of maintaining a star shows to be overly excessive (Kashner, 2015; Steinberger, 2016).



Despite Michelin Star chefs proving to be a fertile field of scholastic exploration of late (e.g., Albors-Garrigos et al., 2013; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007, 2008, 2009; Stierand, 2015; Stierand et al., 2014), this thesis project submits turns its focus onto an alternative yet high underrepresented subclass of chefs. In particular, this study looks to move away from past studies' preferential discourse and instead look into a specific group of extraordinary chefs that literature has suggested, to be embedded in gastronomy's artistic stream of work – pastry chefs.

*Pastry chefs as a context for culinary creativity*

*The Fine Arts are five in number: painting, music, poetry, sculpture, and architecture – whereof the principal branch is confectionery.*

- Marie-Antoine Carême, Chef 1784-1833

Marie-Antoine Carême's declaration of pastry to be a branch of architecture has long been backed by professionals of those of pastry and other culinary fields alike. Krondl (2011) for one when describing pâtisserie, compares the domain to the likes of decorative arts fitting for jewelry stores or fine cabinetry, whilst its symphonic composition bears close semblance to those of a 'virtuoso musical performance, perfectly crafted but also impermanent and fleeting' (p. 5). Caracostea (cited in Hermé, 2015) adds that pastry is simply a distinct manifestation of design, and that it is inside the work lives of pastry chefs do they intrinsically compare themselves to the likes of sensorial artists, which carries no less prestige to those of architects, poets, or music composers. In addition, the viewpoints of pastry chefs as artistic figures could be traced back directly to age-old traditions commissioned by European royalty in the fourteenth century. Back then, some of Europe's renowned pastry chefs and confectioners were not only known for dessert preparations at the end of royal feasts, but also for crafting edible sculptures and showpieces made from edible ingredients, most notably from sugar (Adams, 2011; Kirsch, 2004; Woloson,

2002). These monumental artistries reflect a chef's exclusive standing and craftsmanship, separating them from ordinary cooks (Woloson, 2002). Just as sugar, desserts and other constructions of sweet sensations have in its longest traditions been affordable to the rich and the wealthy (Kronl, 2011). On this note, pastry chefs of Europe's past were privileged craftsmen who flood royalties with ornate sugar works and tasteful delights at the end of royal feasts. Today, pastry chefs across the globe are no longer limited to the constrained view as the preparer of desserts; they instead take on modernist impressionism in their world of work, as they aspire to portray artistic styles that break the rules of conventional *pâtisserie* (Boyle & Moriarty, 1997).

Despite history's declaration of pastry chefs as worthy bearers of the artist's title, their prestigious statures have been rather faint in the scholastic realm. Various studies who focused on culinary creativity studies seemingly turned a blind eye on the *pâtisserie* field, and instead focus on cuisines and savory/hot cooking that falls under the realm of haute cuisine – a symbolic system of routines and artefacts in the culinary field endorsed by strict standards led by leading food critics (i.e., the Michelin Guide) (see Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003, 2005; Stierand et al., 2014; Svejenova et al., 2007; Svejenova, Planellas, & Vives, 2010). Nonetheless, a scant number of works do however note that the career routes of pastry chefs are profoundly more difficult as compared to those of other cookery categories attributed by the stricter set of rules that *pâtisserie* comprises of (Ferguson & Zukin, 1998). As Labensky, Martel, and Van Damme (2009) delineates, pastry making requires a separate mindset, where one are subjected to distinct ingredients, 'accurate measurements,' and 'formulas' (p. 926). In addition, other branches of literature has vividly portrayed that the field of *pâtisserie* is constructed upon a different lexicon that improbably pays tribute to the elements of time, precision, memories, and even humidity as 'ingredients' to their creations (Ansel, 2014; Ruhlman, 2009). Despite of this, there is no known study to date that tackles the field of *pâtisserie* as a lone standing field for creativity studies, but yet historians still steadfastly have compared the constituents of pastry to the works of fine arts.

All in all, the scant sources of literature highly reflects that pâtisserie comprises of its own set of rules that constitutes as a separate career line incomparable to those of other culinary categories, and should in essence, be considered a field of its own (Leschziner, 2015, p. 13).

In ensuring that this study benefits from the most representative sample that meets the notion of ‘investigating the extraordinary’, this study looks to national representatives of one of the most prestigious international competitions in the culinary world – the *Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie*, also known as the World Pastry Cup. The World Pastry Cup is a biennial competition inaugurated since 1989, which welcomes 22 teams representing their nations and their respective culinary identities. Each nation is required to go through rigorous qualifying stages within respective geographical regions prior to main event, which includes 50 national selection trials and 4 continental events. In essence, the World Pastry Cup embraces that pastry chefs are true creators and artistic directors of their creations, as each team are required to produce three ‘artistic creations’ made from sugar, chocolate and hydric ice (one of each) accompanied by a presentation buffet encompassing three modern tasting desserts for a panel of internationally renowned juries (Coupe du Monde Pâtisserie, 2016). Moreover, the World Pastry Cup is known to bring out chefs’ artistic nature on a grand scale, as artistic elegance, appeal and originality accounts for a whopping 40 percent of the total judging criteria (Coupe du Monde Pâtisserie, 2016, p. 9). On top of that, this mega culinary event also allows competing chefs to reflect themes of national identity, network and share culinary values, while also not forgoing the human and solidary touch by advancing pâtisserie excellence exhibited through their competition performance (Wood, Sturny, Neill, Brown, & Aprea, 2015). All things considered, in this study’s quest to explore chefs’ artistic creativity, it is essential for this study to investigate chefs that ‘live’ within the artistic rhetoric, which this thesis submits to include pastry chefs who are national flag-bearers in the prestigious World Pastry Cup. By doing so, this study meets Stierand and Lynch (2008) statement in which argued that culinary innovation and creative ideas must

emerge beyond the limited views of current studies and understandings. On this note, this study decisively moves away from conventional research efforts in studying Michelin Star and haute cuisine chefs, and instead, immerses into lifeworld of pastry chefs.

### Malaysia Pastry Team as a 'New World' Entity

In addition to the notion of 'investigating the extraordinary', this paper in particular, aims to examine the representatives of the Malaysia Pastry Team as a 'New World' entity, in their approach towards the World Pastry Cup. The term 'New World' derives from the wine sector, whereby the 'Old/New World' dichotomy is the most recognized way in categorizing wine producing countries. The simplest explanation in distinguishing the difference between Old and New World wines regions comes down to acknowledging the 'colonizers and the colonized.' Those countries that struck out across the world in search of new land to inhabit are categorized as the Old World (e.g., Spain, Italy, France); while their colonies are of the New World (e.g., United States of America, Australia, New Zealand) (Henderson & Rex, 2012).

In light of this, international culinary competitions including the World Pastry Cup, also portrays the duality of Old World and New World mind-sets. One study in particular (Wood et al., 2015), followed the New Zealand junior pastry team's journey in the 2013 Junior World Pastry Cup in Rimini, Italy. In representing a New World nation, the team experienced several difficulties in which those of Old World nations did not, such as economics of transportation, challenge in creating a national identity on the world pastry stage, and more importantly, the differences in creativity perception (Wood et al., 2015). The influences of Old World nations' legacies on the gastronomy world pose as a challenge for all non-Old World entities. To illustrate, Ferguson (2010) expresses that the Bocuse d'Or (another mega culinary competition) "retains a noticeably French inflection... Should we expect otherwise? French culinary techniques and base

preparations continue to play a big role in the training of chefs around the world” (p. 106). In fact, Old World nations (i.e., France, Italy, Belgium & Spain) persist to be a dominating force in the World Pastry Cup, winning the competition twelve times in between them. Only Japan the U.S. (New World nations) have won it on three occasions (Coupe du Monde Pâtisserie, 2017). Wood et al. (2015) explains that this arises due to the possible Eurocentric taste preferences among Old World nations, as unfamiliar flavor profiles from non-Old World entities may be perceived as exotic and neophobic for the Old World’s palates (Pliner & Salvy, 2006).

Given Malaysia’s colonial history with the British, Dutch, French and Portuguese, Malaysia is by definition, a New World entity. The nation is both well-recognized and positioned as a food paradise attributed to its culinary diversity originating from a multiethnic society (Raji, Karim, Ishak, & Arshad, 2017). Moreover, past studies have noted that the nation is strongly referenced as heritage cuisine tourist destination (Omar, Karim, & Omar, 2015) that is rich in street food culture (Karim & Halim, 2014), and even as a coffee destination (Lee, Lee, Chua, & Han, 2017). However, it has never been associated as a ‘pastry destination,’ despite its history with the French colony. Desserts and pastry items associated to the cultural nexus of Malaysia are and associated distantly to those of European delicacies. Typical Malaysian desserts that best represents the nation could be linked to the Malay cultural heritage, which circulates around items made from native ingredients (e.g., palm sugar and coconut milk) that may pose as bizarre or exotic to those of from other regions and continents (Raji et al., 2017). In the World Pastry Cup however, Malaysia has proven otherwise, as they came close to the podium in 2015, taking home third runner-up spot in the prestigious competition. The Malaysian team has also won the ‘Best Chocolate Creation’ award in 2015, and was crowned champions in the Asian Pastry Cup in 2014. This implies that despite Malaysia’s faint establishment as a pastry destination, the nation however, reflects a fostering New World entity that has cemented itself as a strong force in Asia, as well as the global realm in the prestigious World Pastry Cup.

Hereafter, this study looks upon Malaysia's pastry chefs as a 'New World entity' in respects to their collected journeys in the World Pastry Cup from 2007 to 2017. Specifically, this study targets the Malaysia pastry team's representatives as 'extraordinary pastry chefs' in hopes of making a contribution in an academic domain currently underrepresented in literature. That is, the challenges faced in creativity that New World entities face in an Old World dominant event, by using the World Pastry Cup as an exemplary setting.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the essences of culinary creativity through the lifeworld of Malaysian pastry chefs who participated in the prestigious World Pastry Cup. The specific research objectives were:

RQ1. What are the essences of Malaysian pastry chefs' culinary creativity?

RQ2. How does culinary creativity compare to artistic creativity?

This chapter is designed to situate the study within phenomenology. It opens with a subjectivity statement of myself as a research instrument, which is then followed by a discussion regarding my philosophical stance as a social constructivist. Moreover, this chapter also provides a detailed description of the essential aspects of the study, which include an introduction and the rationale for phenomenology as a methodology, interpretivism as the theoretical lens, the sampling method, and the methods utilized during the data collection and analysis.

## Subjectivity Statement

Qualitative research “hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork – as well as things going on in a person’s life that might prove distraction” (Patton, 2015, p. 22). The researcher is, of course, not exempted from the aforementioned ‘distraction.’ Hence, I dedicate this section to properly express the potential ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ my subjectivity might enter the study (Peshkin, 1988). All researchers bring values to a study. As a qualitative researcher, I am obligated to make my values potential biases known in the current study. Creswell (2012) calls this obligation ‘axiological assumptions.’ Hence, as a former chef interviewing and observing other chefs means that I cannot refrain from my own pre-understandings. I understand that my subjectivity may potentially ‘filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project’ (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Thus, I will provide relevant information on my background as a chef and my own experience of creativity which make up my subjectivity:

*Throughout my professional culinary career, I have a short, yet rich five-year experience apprenticing for several world-renowned chefs in my home country, Malaysia. These experiences revolved around Chinese cuisine, French cuisine, French pâtisserie, chocolate artistry and sugar artistry. The majority of the chefs I’ve worked or apprenticed for are actively engage in culinary competitions both locally and internationally, where creativity and aesthetic appeal accounts for a significant portion of the judging criteria. I’ve assisted them on many accounts from the practice stages to the main events, and have always been curious about how and where their inspiration derives from. In addition, I’ve also personally partaken in several competitions both locally in Malaysia, and internationally, winning numerous medals and awards. I’ve participated in some where creative flavor combinations are the main focal point of the judging criteria, but also others where artistic appeal and creative synthesis makes up*



*the majority of the score. I personally adopt different approaches when competing in different categories, in hopes to meet the parameters and criteria that the competition rules and expectations are built on.*

*In my own personal encounter with culinary creativity, I often refer to culinary books and social media for inspiration, go through countless trials and errors, and constantly seek guidance and advice from my past chef-mentors. As a young chef, I am less ambitious regarding flavor combinations, and often look for safe and well-established combinations embedded in culinary traditions. I, however, enjoy plating and the aesthetics of finishing culinary products, especially in relation to pastry garnishes and creating chocolate decorations. During such instances, I often have a desired picture of the decoration in my mind, in which I would sketch out on a piece of scrap paper to help capture the visual before execution. The execution process is perhaps the most enjoyable activity the process, which requires my wholehearted concentration that is best analogized and compare to the crafting of clay or painting on a canvas.*

*In my current program of study, I am actively engaged in writing several scholastic manuscripts regarding the chef profession. This involves topics not only about artistic creativity, but also about chefs as entrepreneurial leaders and the contentious issue of workplace abuse in kitchen environments. I am also an active culinary instructor at a hospitality school in a Midwestern State University, in which I am responsible for introducing novice hospitality students to the professional kitchen environment.*

In brief, my experiences as an apprentice-chef in the pastry world for several years before changing course in becoming an academic and a culinary instructor would play dividend throughout the research process. As a qualitative researcher, it is my duty to be aware and make my readership aware of both my experience that brings me to this topic and of my biases and pre-

assumptions that may enter the study, especially those of my creative experiences. Therefore, steps to ensure credibility and trustworthiness were taken and will be discussed further in later sections. My experiences as an “insider” with this topic have allowed me to have access to some of the top pastry chefs in the world, initiate deeper conversations with participants, as well as provide an explanation of the contextual meaning of the culinary creativity phenomenon. Also, my subjectivity statement evolved over time throughout the study, as I continuously revisit in writing during the process of epoche (a state of mind of philosophical solitude, in which I discuss meticulously in this chapter).

### Philosophical Stance and Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions inform research. They are “a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17), meaning one’s philosophical assumptions not only inform the decision as to whether one will do a qualitative or quantitative research design, but also the methodology, theoretical perspective and methods. By properly conveying my philosophical stance, I hope to clearly explain the underlying assumptions that shape “how I know what I know.” As a social constructivist, I seek to examine and understand the essence of the phenomenon of culinary creativity by looking for the complexity in multiple chefs’ views (Creswell, 2013). In other words, I aim to highlight the unique experiences of each individual, and seek understanding on how chefs make meaning in the midst of their culinary experiences. Crotty (1998, pp. 8-9) states that social constructivists do not subscribe to one objective truth, and that “meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.” Therefore, I embarked upon this research not seeking one objective truth. But

rather I sought several, if not, numerous constructions of ‘subjective truths’ held by different individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Moreover, I adopt the theoretical perspective of an interpretivist, in which my personal interests, intuition and reflection towards the research process also played dividend to pathway of research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that this perspective respects the researcher’s involvement in the research process, as the process of inquire is value-bound rather than value-free under the context of the study. As an interpretivist, I believe that understanding derives from the interactions with my participants, and that each individual creates his/her own meaning based on the experiences exclusive to that individual. This stance supports, aligns and adds value to my research objectives in discovering the essences of culinary creativity and how it compares with artistic creativity. Because culinary creativity is measured and defined by the parameters constructed and appreciated socially in the gastronomy context (Stierand et al., 2014).

Like all qualitative designs, this study is naturalistic in nature which allows the study to unfold naturally with limited influence from the researcher. In other words, it reflects an “openness to whatever emerges” from the study (Patton, 2015, p. 46). Thus, I embarked on a discovery oriented approach in the context of culinary creativity, which allows for the exploration of a complex phenomenon to potentially be explicated. In short, my goal is to highlight the unique experience of each chef and how they make sense of their creative experience, as the experiential process would inevitably differ from one individual to another.

Having unpacked a description of me as the research instrument with a subjectivity statement and a clarification of philosophical assumptions in this section, the subsequent sections moves forward provides a description of the phenomenological approach and its relations to the purpose of this study.

## The Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenology approach is best regarded as a qualitative exploration of a distinct phenomenon, in which the central concern is to explore the “embodied, experiential meanings aiming for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 6). In simpler terms, the approach mainly aims to describe the common meaning(s) of a phenomenon by investigating the actual lived experience of those who lived it. Commonly carried out through unstructured interviews, the approach helps deduce the phenomenon into a description of universal essence(s) that best describes and represent the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology concerns less so on interpretations, and more so on the descriptions of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). I chose to follow the systematic route laid out by Moustakas (1994), in which he terms as transcendental phenomenology. This includes a comprehensive and systematic process of firstly describing the researcher’s personal experiences, proceeded by listing significant statements from the data sources, grouping clustered meanings together, writing a description of what was experienced, and how it was experienced, and then, finally arriving at the essences through a composite description of the phenomenon as a whole (Creswell, 2012). Transcendental phenomenology is most suitable for this study because it sets aside my preconceptions about the phenomenon, and focuses on the experiential episodes of interest (Moustakas, 1994). This allows categories and themes of culinary creativity to emerge without much influence from my pre-understandings (Conceição, 2006). There are three key procedures in performing transcendental phenomenology, which are (1) *epoche*, (2) transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and (3) imaginative variation.

The first process involves the *epoche*, which is a Greek word that means “to refrain from judgement, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). This involves setting aside prior scientific as well as methodological assumptions to allow myself to “recollect [my] own experiences and to empathically enter and reflect on the lived world [and experiences] of other persons” (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). Also known as ‘bracketing’, the *epoche* process does not remove me as a researcher from the study, instead it is a philosophical mindset and attitude that helps prevent past knowledge to partake in the study (Giorgi, 2009). The *epoche* is the first and necessary step for phenomenological studies.

I practiced constant self-reflection and review of my subjectivity throughout the research process. This included firstly, a written subjectivity statement, which I revisit consistently. Moreover, I also re-listen to my audiotaped memos that I made before and after each interview, some which I partially transcribed. This practice provided a research instrument “check” on what I brought to my interviews, such as frame of mind, biases, connections and insights to literature and personal and professional history. More importantly, this process helped me to remain as objective as possible to the meanings that emerged during data analysis. Although it was difficult to bracket myself during the interview process, the *epoche* was embedded to the best of my abilities during each interview. Given these measures, “the *epoche* process creates a unique sort of philosophical solitude, which is the fundamental methodical requirement for a truly radical philosophy” (Husserl, 1970, p. 184). These recorded, “bracketed” “internal memos” helped me concentrate on the phenomenon with limited influence.

During the data analysis stage, I incorporated two processes – transcendental-phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. The transcendental-phenomenological reduction aims to describe the *textural language* of ‘what’ one sees during the experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This is achieved through the analysis of “significant statements” from each transcription in verbatim and further reducing it to form clusters of meanings. The

imaginative variation process follows with the primary aim to “arrive at a *structural description* of an experience... in other words, the ‘how’ that speaks to conditions that illuminate the ‘what’ of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

In summary, the main purpose of this approach is to understand and describe the creative experience of world-renown chefs, pursuing the essence(s) of their experiences (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology as a methodology seeks to understand the phenomenon through the lived experience of the individuals who are directly involved, hence explicating an eidetic notion (such as artistic creativity) into one of idiographic sense (Finlay, 2009).

### Sampling method

Selecting the most suitable individuals that could best describe the lived experience of culinary creativity is of the utmost importance for phenomenologists (Creswell, 2012). This study looks to Malaysia’s representatives of one of the most prestigious international pâtisserie competition in the culinary world – the *Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie*, also known as the World Pastry Cup – as it is known to bring out chefs’ artistic and creative nature on a grand scale given that artistic elegance, appeal and originality accounts for a whopping forty percent of the total judging criteria (Coupe du Monde Pâtisserie, 2016, p. 9). As Malaysia’s pastry chefs have qualified for the World Pastry Cup since 2007 and I had apprenticed for one of them, my home country became a natural and convenient site for data collection. Therefore, to ensure that this study benefits from the most representative group of individuals that best manifests artistic creativity, I adopted two sampling strategies – purposeful sampling (pastry chefs who represented Malaysia in the World Pastry Cup) and snowball sampling (those pastry chefs who they referred me to). Purposeful sampling refers to selecting participants that permits inquiry and

understanding of a phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2015). With that being said, I sampled based on the following essential criteria:

- (1) participants must have represented his/her nation of Malaysia in the prestigious World Pastry Cup;
- (2) are actively involved in the culinary profession;
- (3) and have the willingness to partake in an interview process that involved follow-up interviews.

As Malaysia is also my home country, I spent my 2017 winter break collecting data. The context of Malaysia is significant to this study as Nelson and Rawlings's (2007) suggest that creativity needs to be understood not only with the reference to the individual but also to the context in which the individual is in, taking into account the contextual understandings of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996)

In addition, snowball sampling was also employed so that participating individuals could refer me to other individuals who meet the aforementioned criterions to partake in the study. The first participant was a personal contact of mine, in which I apprenticed for and seek guidance from during my professional career. The first participant then functioned as the initial 'snowball' which provided referrals to new participants who meets the pre-mandated criterions (Patton, 2015). Whilst most qualitative studies often determine their sample sizes based on concept of data saturation, this is however, uneasily achieved in phenomenological studies, as singular themes and notions are known to be exclusive to each individuals' experiences (van Manen, 2014). In phenomenology studies, sample sizes differ in accordance to the exclusiveness of the phenomenon, where even single-cases can yield findings that are highly textured (Finlay, 2009; Halling, 2008; Todres & Galvin, 2005). Nonetheless, Giorgi suggests that a minimum of three participants is required because 'a sufficient number of variations are needed in order to come up

with a typical essence” (2008, p. 37). Ultimately, van Manen concludes by stating that ‘the outcome of the study should contain just the right amount of experiential material that creates a scholarly and reflective phenomenological text’ (2014, p. 353). As this study aimed to understand the phenomenon of creativity through the lived experience of Malaysian pastry chefs who partook in the World Pastry Cup, a census of sixteen individuals were identified. Of the sixteen, three individuals have unfortunately already deceased, which bounded the census to a list of thirteen possible individuals. Upon contacting each of them through the first participant, four rejected the research invitation whilst the remaining nine individuals happily accepted the invitation offer.

### Data Collection

Conducted from the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2017 and to the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, I committed to four data collection methods to achieve triangulation. This included primarily semi-structured interviews that lasted one to four hours (discussed in detail in the following section), two distinct material artifacts, which were each pastry chef’s personal sketch books and photographs of their creations. And lastly, given the interwoven relationships and shared experiences that each chef has between one another, I also drew references from statements made by each individual towards one another. In this section I provide the details on each collection method, beginning with material artifacts.

#### *Material artifacts*

I collected the material artifacts that were offered by the participant and emerged during the interview. Material artifacts resemble “objects that people produce” in their everyday lives (Esterberg, 2002), and serve as a powerful reflection of people’s real lives and real-world settings



(Rowse, 2011). Moreover, such artifacts may help reveal hidden information or signal greater dimensions of participant stories in interview dialogues, as Turkle (2007) states ‘there is the power of boundary objects and the general principle that objects are active life presences’ (p. 9). Therefore, these objects may potentially signal *essential* dimensions of a lived experience and help in understanding the *essence(s)* of the creative experience.

Participants offered sketches and preliminary renditions of their ideas, creations, as well as documented pictures during the culinary creative process. In addition, they also offered photographs of the finished product itself. In addition, some participants offered other sources of artifacts such as influential culinary books that facilitated their inspirations. These material artifacts added a visual rich dimension to the interviews. Additionally, I also conducted “member check” pertaining to issues of clarity through text messaging, video calls, and emails to clarify and confirm my understandings and interpretations during the analytical process. The majority of pastry chefs were not comfortable with observations, due to strict rules and policies at their workplaces, team confidentiality issues related to upcoming competitions, or simply being away during the December festive days. However, given the variety of collected artifacts corresponding with in-depth interviews and member checks, the data resulted from “an arsenal of methods that have non-overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths” (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p. 17).

### *Interviews*

I employed in-depth unstructured interviews as my primary source of data collection. As Patton (2015) states, interviews are the most common tool for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to “probe and yield greater responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge” (p. 14). I prepared a protocol that included a list of twelve

interview questions, all designed to elicit the lived experience(s) of culinary creativity, which was based off the phenomenological guidelines recommended by Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014). I also consulted prominent research in the area of artistic creativity and culinary creativity in formulating my list of questions (i.e., Leschziner, 2015; Nelson & Rawlings, 2007; Page, 2017; Stierand & Dörfler, 2012). The final interview protocol was then reviewed by the major advisor and committee members, one in which was familiar with the phenomenological approach. Changes in the interview protocol included changes in vocabulary usage in the questions, which aimed to better elicit the episodic experiences of culinary creativity. This included in particular, the variation in word usage associated with the term ‘creativity,’ such as ‘imagination,’ ‘play,’ ‘inspire,’ and ‘innovate.’ I used these terms interchangeably, considering some terms may have more “connection” or resonate more to one’s experience, which ultimately resulted in my respondents sharing greater description about their creative experiences. Blum (2011) termed these questions as “watershed questions,” which could open ‘the floodgates of memory’ (p. 233). As a result, each participant was very forthcoming with sharing and showed great enthusiasm in their responses, with one response naturally flowing into the response to another question, without my asking, rendering a seemingly comfortable, casual conversation. Whilst some talked and expressed more than others, the core questions in relation to my research objectives were all answered. Each interview session was conducted at the participant’s site of preference in Malaysia and ranged from forty-five minutes to three hours. Those that were longer included multiple breaks in between.

I started off each interview with an opening statement that sets the tone in introducing the purpose of the study. This kept our conversation (for the most time) on topic, in which phenomenologist Fraelich (1989, cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 108) states is essential, as it provided “an opening remark geared to encourage the participant to initiate his or her own search [and to convey] the overall purpose and intent of the interview.” After introducing the purpose, I

then began with a couple of preliminary questions to establish rapport. Using my role as an insider as well as having researched the background on each participant, I started with questions or statements associated with their recognition, such as “where did your nickname come from?” and “I am a big fan of your work on...” This initial conversation, I believe, was pivotal in acknowledging each one’s legacy and/or status and showing that I had done my homework. Following this, I started with a broad question of “what inspired you to become a chef?” to get the conversation going, which then bled onto the rest of my interview questions.

In addition, given that each participant shared interwoven relationships and experiences that between one another, I also drew references from statements made by each individual towards one another. This helped supplemented finer details to each pastry chef’s stories of creativity from another perspective, all in which added greater confirmation to some respondents’ story and narratives. One particular interview however, was particularly challenging given my relational history with him. Glesne (2010) referred to this as a potential problem termed “over-rapport,” in which the researcher is in threat of engaging in friendship that may bring about undesired biases into the phenomenon of focus. Nonetheless, the *epoche* process played a pivoting role in this. I engaged in self-conscious reflexivity in attempts to isolate myself into a stance of philosophical solitude as recommended by Husserl (1970) and Moustakas (1994); noting my presumptions and past experiences with him. I was particularly careful in analyzing the transcription of my interview with him and my reflective voice memos. Moreover, I involved a committee member and an external member to help review my analytical notes to ensure that my subjectivity did not interfere. We then compared our understanding and meanings of the transcripts before drawing to the final conclusion.

## Data Analysis and Representation

The data analysis was broken down into two main phases: the first was to capture the individual essences of each pastry chef's creative experiences, followed by the second, which was to categorize and group these essences into themes that best encapsulates and represents Malaysian World pastry chefs' creative experiences. To elicit the former, I utilized portraiture (as coined by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997) as a vessel to help portray each chef's unique experiences. This led to nine distinct yet rich "portraits of creativity" being portrayed, which was then followed by a further deductive analysis to help group each essence together into themes. The details of these two phases are discussed in this section.

### *Phase 1: Portraiture*

Given each chef's distinct background, values, and beliefs, it was important that I describe to my readership the exclusivities of each chef in this study. Inspired by the resonant excerpts of Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1983) ethnographic portrayals of high schools, I adopted portraiture in describing my chefs creativity experiences. Portraiture is a unique qualitative method that produces a written document resembling of portrait of a phenomenon through the researcher's perspective and voice (Hackmann, 2002). It comprehends to the several central elements of qualitative research such as reflexivity, voice, relationships, metaphor and authenticity with an emphasis on the researcher's artistic ability to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Waterhouse, 2007). In portraiture, the researcher's hunches and perspectives are woven into the portraits, which aim to capture the essences of the matter just as an artist would in an actual painting. In addition, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) noted that portraiture is best "framed by the phenomenological lens... [as it] seeks to illuminate the complex dimensions of goodness and is designed to capture the attention of a broad and eclectic audience," (p. xvi). On

this note, the researcher implicitly enters each chef's lives, builds relationships, engages in discourse and makes an imprint before leaving (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). The outcome would then resemble a text piece that comes as close as possible to a painting, but in words.

The *epoche* process plays an immense role in ensuring that I remain object during both the analysis and reporting stage. During both stages, I engaged in constant self-reflection, bracketing, and also critical debates with one committee member to ensure that my voice remains as objective as possible. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated,

*The portraitist's voice [...] is everywhere – Overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes. But her voice is also a premeditated one, restrained, disciplined, and carefully controlled. Her voice never overshadows the actors' voice (though it sometimes is heard in duet, in harmony and counterpoint). The actors sing the solo lines, the portraitist supporting their efforts at articulation, insight, and expressiveness. (p. 85)*

In short, the portraits of my respondents were portrayed with much commitments to remain as objective as possible, ensuring that my voice remains as a supporting character that never steals the limelight from those of my respondents (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

In this phenomenology study, I 'painted portraits' of each distinguished pastry chef based on interviews and associated artifacts. Not only that, each participant also made references to each other due to their closeness as representatives of the Malaysian pastry team. Hence, I was able to triangulate these sources during the development of each portrait. Throughout the process, I constantly 'listened for a story' and 'seek for the deviant voice' that was concealed underneath each statement (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The goal was to bring out the silence hiding underneath each portrait, while maintaining objectivity through *epoche*. For example in one

interview, the chef was unwilling to describe in full details about a devastating experience tied to his World Pastry Cup journey. Despite the failure to illuminate the story from the chef himself, it was later revealed in full light by his teammate, who co-experienced the situation and cooperatively provided the details and also artifacts that eventually explicated the experience (see Portrait #1: the War General).

In essence, the usage of portraiture was aimed to provide a reader-friendly description of each chef's creative essences so that readers could have the opportunity to reflect and draw relevance to. This is much like a description of a case, where Stake (2003) states that "people find in case reports certain insights into the human condition even while being aware of the atypicality of the case" (p. 147).

#### Coding procedure for portraiture

After approximately twenty hours of voice transcriptions that spread across three hundred and eighty pages, I then used three methods to help facilitate the analysis procedure for each portrait: critical incidents, narrative coding, and open coding. The analysis process began with first, an identification of critical incidents and narratives identified by each respondent, which echoed much reference to Flanagan's (1954) famed *critical incident technique*. Chell (1998) describes this technique as a method to help "facilitate the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes, or issues) identified by the respondent" (p. 56). I adopted this technique as a primary pair of lenses during each revisit to my data transcripts, which helped ensure that no essential stories were left unreported. These stories (critical incidents) then served as an anchor that guided the remaining of the data analysis process, in which I utilized open coding and narrative coding to help enhance each incident. Open coding refers to a process of breaking down qualitative data such as texts and descriptions into distinct individualized parts,

allowing qualitative researchers the opportunity to view them from a neutral point of view, hence open to all possible directions (Saldana, 2016). This was supplemented by narrative coding, which refers to an analysis of qualitative text that resonates in the form of stories told by the respondents. In other words, the narrative coding process allowed me to identify the nuts and bolts that supports and enhances the identified critical incidents. This allowed me as a portraitist, to identify the underlying meanings behind the “storied,” allowing me to “potentially create a richer aesthetic through a retelling” (Saldana, 2016, p. 154). By adopting both coding lenses, I navigated through the analysis process with the best interest of each chef’s creativity stories told in mind.

In summary, by incorporating the aforementioned coding techniques in this phenomenological study, I hope to go beyond the mere describing of my respondents’ creative experiences, and instead reach deeper into the trenches of their personas as creative individuals, capturing their essences that would otherwise be left undiscovered (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

### *Phase 2: Phenomenological reduction*

Following the first phase, I incorporated Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological analytical processes in phase two, which included two processes, transcendental-phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. The transcendental-phenomenological reduction aims to describe the *textural language* of ‘what’ one sees during the experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This is achieved through the analysis of “significant statements,” followed by further reduction to form clusters of meanings. The imaginative variation process on the other hand, aims to “arrive at a *structural description* of an experience... in other words, the ‘how’ that speaks to conditions that illuminate the ‘what’ of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

Following these two processes, I engaged in pattern coding, which is a second cycle coding process that helps categorize summaries into smaller themes and concepts (Saldana, 2016, p. 237). I pulled together various materials, stories, incidents, and initial codes formulated from the portraiture in the first phase and deduced them into more eloquent themes. More specifically, I analyzed the various similarities and nuances across each portrait, bringing them together into one holistic portrayal. This analytical phase served two purposes. The first is to pull together the various clustered materials from the previous two chapters and portray them into major themes that encapsulate the essences of culinary creativity. And second, to offer discussion points for each theme by drawing theories and comparing findings from previous relevant works. Much like the portraiture in the first phase, I maintained the voice as a portraitist, while also constantly reflecting upon the all-important *epoche* process (bracketing) in synthesizing the various essences of culinary creativity. In short, by following these principles as guiding factor, I was then able to distill the textural and structural essences from initial portraiture, capturing them in four unique and encompassing themes.

### Ethical considerations

Several steps were taken to ensure that no participants were harmed during this study. Firstly, I completed the Oklahoma State University's institutional review board (IRB) process prior to conducting the study to ensure that all aspects of my study was approved and authorized safe. Moreover, I also prepared an informed consent form that explained key aspects of my study, warranted confidentiality, and detailed the participants' rights to not answer any questions that may cause discomfort. Interestingly, despite being notified that each participant's names, titles, and organization information will be euphemized to achieve confidentiality, each participant chose not to euphemize their names, as each participant took pride in their creative journeys.



While two individuals chose to use their professional nicknames instead, the remaining participants shared the commonality of wanting their names to be told in their stories. Moving forward, I also conducted member checks via texts, video calls, and emails to ensure that each participant's stories were not misinterpreted. One participant in particular, asked for one deletion, not because the story was falsely portrayed, but because he preferred that it was to be excluded. Others participants responded and indicated that each portrayal was accurate with limited corrections.

### Trustworthiness

This section explains the various measures taken to achieve trustworthiness, which is a distinct qualitative research term that features the efforts taken to achieve validity and reliability. In particular, qualitative research focuses on three key aspects when arguing trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Credibility helps explain whether the reported findings are an accurate and credible portrayal from the viewpoints of the researcher, the reader, and participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Several measures were taken to increase credibility. First, I utilized a variety of data sources (i.e., sketchbooks, interviews, photographs, and references from other respondents) to help triangulate my data. Secondly, having I clarified my assumptions and subjectivity upfront, I was able to constant reflect upon my potential biasness entering the study. In addition, member checks were also conducted to ensure all reported data were accurate from the standpoints of the participants. Moreover, a constant meeting with one committee member familiar with the phenomenological method served as a "peer debriefing" figure to help enhance the accuracy of my findings. This procedure, much like the member checks, served to ensure that my personal biases did not enter the study.

Dependability parallels with reliability, which concerns with how one can track the research procedures used. To achieve dependability, I intentionally delineated a “trail” of where my data came from, whenever possible in reporting my findings. This was first portrayed through portraiture, in which I have utilized several power quotes to help facilitate and support each narrative and emergent theme. Moreover, during the second phase of the study, rather than seeking similar results from different portraits and sources, I remained open to seek out the inconsistencies, which permitted greater understanding through revealing depth, tensions, complexity and elucidation of the topic. As Patton (2015) notes: “understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative and important... offering opportunities for deeper insight” (p. 661). By embracing such inconsistencies across portraits, the dependability of this study was enhanced through recognizing that not all individual essences are universal, but rather varied that demands greater care and attention during the analysis stage.

Transferability combats the ideology of generalizability, as qualitative research cannot expect its findings to be generalizable across settings (Patton, 2015). Instead, transferability concerns not whether the study includes a representative sample, but rather it is about how well outlined and defined are the parameters of my study’s contexts. As I “painted my portraits,” I intentionally made clear through rich, thick, and specific descriptions of the study’s context, so that readers could draw specific insights from the study, while still being aware of the exceptionalities of the study’s parameters (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). By doing so, I hope that my readership is well-informed with of the various exceptionalities unique to their experiences, thus allowing greater transferability of my reported findings. In essence, I have taken several necessary measures to establish trustworthiness from not only the researcher and the participants’ standpoints, but also the standpoints of my readers as well.

## Chapter Summary

All things considered, in this chapter I have unpacked myself as a researcher with a subjectivity statement, described my philosophical stances and assumptions, as well as discussed the rationale behind the phenomenological approach. In addition, I have detailed the sampling methods, data collection and various analysis procedures, while also resolving issues pertaining ethics and trustworthiness.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS PART 1

The creative experiences of nine outstanding pastry chefs are treated as individual cases. I begin with nine rich “portraits” based on Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) guidelines of portraiture as a vehicle of portraying creativity that captures the essences that would otherwise be left uncaptured. In these portraits, I aim to portray the essence of culinary creativity, constructed on the basis of three distinct data sources, which include (1) their own descriptions of themselves in the interview process, (2) artifacts that emerged as points of discussions, and also (3) references from other study participants. In particular, I report the clustered meanings found in each chef as themes that represent the textural and structural essences that illuminate their experiences and life views on creativity. The portraits are reported across two chapters (IV & V) based on my respondents’ the interwoven experiences and closeness as a team in representing Malaysia. In this chapter, I begin with four chefs who I gave aliases in accordance to their personality and traits. The four of them (aliased as *the War General*, *the Jester*, *the Mad Scientist*, and *the Survivor*) are the best of friends and former work colleagues, which together collectively, have shared multiple creative experiences in both everyday work and competition participation. I start off with first describing perhaps the most respected member of the group, the *War General*.

### Portrait #1: Chef Wei Loon – “The War General”

Crowned Asia Champions in 2014 and the most outstanding pastry chef of Malaysia in 2011, Chef Wei Loon is without a doubt, one of the most influential chefs in Asia. He is passionate, charismatic, yet humble about his craft, and now travels across continents around the world conducting advanced professional pâtisserie courses. If I could characterize him metaphorically, he would be a war general. Like a strategist, he never enters the battlefield without a plan, regardless of whether it was a daily routine task in the kitchen or participating in the prestigious World Pastry Cup. It is the adrenaline associated to the international competition stage that drives him as a creator. Like most well-accomplished strategists, his successes did not come in the absence of failure. In his case, it was devastation. Unwilling to reveal the meticulous details of the story, which involved tears and sorrows, his teammate who co-experienced the situation, shared the following:

*I was working on my chocolate display; it was the final few moments of the competition. And then all you hear was the sounds of shattering glass... at that very moment everyone in the whole arena, the teams next to us, the spectators, the judges, everyone was shocked... The whole arena went silent... It was a moment that you feel it... you prepared for the World Pastry Cup with all your dreams and ambitions as a pastry chef... and everything crashed in a split second... it was at that moment, we knew it... we were done... it was a nightmare...*

- Chef Otto

The excerpt above, described what was meant to be a wild, ambitious and mystical portrayal of *Vulcan – the God of Fire* – made from nothing but ingredients associated with sugar. His work of art was shattered devastatingly into pieces during the final moments of the World Pastry Cup in 2013 (see Figure 1). Despite the travesty, which resulted in tears and sorrows, the

General returned to the battlefield the very next year with fire in his eyes together with Chef Otto, and the two were crowned champions of Asia. They then proceeded to lead their country to an astounding ranking of fourth place in the subsequent World Pastry Cup in 2015.



*Figure 1 Left: Image of 'Vulcan - The God of Fire' during the practice trials prior to the World Pastry Cup 2013; Right: the unfortunate devastation at the World Pastry Cup 2013*

After their tremendous run in placing fourth in the world in 2015, the War General took a year off away from competitions and instead served as the team manager and consultant to the new flag-bearers of Malaysia. Yet, there is still hunger in his eyes during every mention of the word ‘World Cup.’ Like most retired soldiers, his heart still lives in the flashbacks of the battlefield. Hungry for more, he sets eyes for gold for the World Pastry Cup in 2019.

The War General experiences culinary creativity in various poignant contexts. I themed these contexts into two major categories – (1) *creative spatial meanings of the kitchen* and (2) *breaking creative limits “on stage”* – all in which encapsulate his creative experiences.

### *Theme 1: Creative spatial meanings of the kitchen*

To the War General, the pastry kitchen resembles a lively environment that reverberates various spatial meanings, which could either fuel or kill a chef's artistic aspirations. As a whole, it was described as a "crazy environment," or a "place of chaos," filled with operational pressures, crowded by busy chefs, and demands long hours of repetitive mechanical work. The atmosphere more often than not, resembles a place that hinders and confines artistic expressions. But it is an eternal flame burning persistently inside him that allows him to see the silver lining in mechanical work. He embraces the tedious and repetitive aspects of the job, entrusting that it would allow him to gain familiarity and efficiency in culinary craftsmanship. He embraces and "takes ownership" of scaling his own ingredients, cleaning tabletops, and making of various pâtisserie items that were deskilled for the sake of efficiency. His eternal flame would however, be extinguished if it was not for "noble beings," and "inspirational figures" in the kitchen, whom are senior chefs who took him under their wings, and guided him to embrace his artistic self in becoming a chef. More importantly, these "noble beings" explained to him the science behind the making of pastry, which included chemistry theories beyond psychomotor skills.

#### Chemistry: How ingredients come into play

*Pastry goes beyond making a cake, there is much more to learn... [This] involved theories and the chemical reactions between ingredients to ingredients.*

- The War General

There was much reference to scientific methods when being in the kitchen. The War General thinks like a chemist when he reads a recipe and when he sees ingredients on kitchen countertops. He thinks not about the cooking procedures, but the chemistry involved in the

making of art. Through this gaze, he frames the kitchen as a place of experiment and play, pondering to the many possibilities as he pushes the limits of what he understands of pâtisserie. The scientific personification reflects on the understanding of pâtisserie theories that supports the artistic embodiment of culinary creativity. In his own words: "...one cannot live without another (referring to the arts and sciences) ... we are scientists when we formulate our recipes, but artists when we make them." Moreover, these scientific connotations have a means to an end. He expresses that his creations must always take into account "the logic and practicality" of the pastry kitchen's operations, while ensuring that the outcome still meets the consumers' palate. Most pertinently, the procedures have to be documented, making sure that the culinary process is replicable, just as a scientist would with his experimental procedures. However, despite being a scientist at work, he never disregards his principles as a chef, which is to serve his "audience," who are the "patrons" of his art. To this end, he describes his creative processes as a constant tradeoff between his imaginations and the principles of being a chef, saying,

*The most unique thing about what we do in the kitchen is that we are producing something that can be eaten... The things that we can put on a plate are artistic components. You are just like an artist, who needs colors, paint brushes, and an empty canvas. For us, ingredients are our colors, the spoons, the spatulas, the tools are our brushes, and the plate is our canvas. But (with emphasis)! You are not just painting, because flavors and the different chemical reactions of pastry ingredients then come into play. This adds an additional dimension to the 'colors' we have. It's not just the shades of colors but also the flavors and knowledge of how we play... We are artists in a very different way, we don't just create paintings that hang on walls, our art pieces are made out of ingredients, it is something for people to eat... which I feel it's the hardest aspect for us when creating.*



Throughout my conversations with the War General, there was much animation in the description of the subject of pâtisserie creativity. He remains steadfast on the matter that a chef is both an artist and a scientist. In this subtheme, the persona of scientist resonates when he interacts with pastry ingredients. In what follows, I provide the descriptions in which the persona of the artist comes to life, which ultimately lays the groundings that portray the artist in full light.

### *Theme 2: Breaking creative limits “on stage”*

All artists require a platform to shine on, which resembles a place or stage for one to perform. To the War General, his first platform came in the space of display counters, which reflect the “first impression of the pastry kitchen” that is through the customers’ gaze. It is also a space where the artistic realm takes over, where he allows intuition and inner senses to dictate the placement and arrangement of desserts alongside decorative showpieces. He describes display counters as “a space for the pastry kitchen to showcase their art and skill on a grand scale.” Moreover, the space of display counters allows the War General to put together a complexion that portrays the pastry team who worked tirelessly behind closed doors. It offers him a place to see beauty in a “place of chaos,” reflecting an “empty canvas” filled with endless possibilities. It is also where the hard work of production is already behind him, and all that is left is to artistically synthesize pieces together on a grand scale.

Apart from display counters also, culinary competitions also forms a symbolic stage for the War General to perform on. Particularly, they pose a challenge and impose a deadline that would otherwise fail to exist if not enforced. They provide the most desirable conditions in which the War General manifests creativity, as it produces an adrenaline rush. It is through competitions, the War General’s strategic skills are exercised at their finest, digging deep into the ranks of the rules of the games. He respects traditions yet twists them in contemporary ways.

What is more important is that it helps him “find his true self” through pushing and breaking his limits, bringing him to a new state of culinary brilliance after each competition. In light of this, he analogizes competitions to a “big examination,” saying,

*It's like a big examination... but the only difference is that you will never fail... even with a poor result, you learn something new... there's always there's a room to grow better... there is no final grade for these sorts of competitions, only better.*

Culinary competitions fill the War General's heart with a “fire,” a fire that fuels his imagination to look for new ways to create. It keeps him on his toes and triggers his mind into the adrenaline rush of “searching,” “playing,” “manipulating,” “twisting,” “sourcing,” and “creating.” The deadline imposed by culinary competitions forces him to strategize and preplan his ideas, pressuring him to cherish whatever preparation time he has. Throughout the experience, he has dug into recipe origins, backstories, historical meanings, and purposefully played with its elements to recapture a product's identity through his view and touch. All in which, would never happen without the deadlines imposed by the competition's parameters. The rewards behind competitions also put a means behind his efforts, causing him to reflect and cherish upon what remaining time he has prior to the event.

*I like the pressure, it helps me to think faster, at the same time I will cherish the time that I have. If I have too much time, I become relaxed. When I am relaxed, my mind won't work... because there's no reward, there's no goal... And because there is no reward, I won't put my best effort forward...*

Different culinary competitions would certainly call for different outcomes, expectations, and judging criteria. One commonality for some of the most grand pastry competitions (e.g., *Mondial Des Arts Sucrés*, the World Pastry Cup, and Asia Pastry Cup etc.) is artistic showpieces, which are best described as ornamental decorative centerpieces made from food ingredients. They

are lavish items that not only considers a chef's combination of skill, time, patience, but also uncontrollable variables such as temperature and humidity of the competition environment (Adams, 2011). It is through showpieces that the War General finds the most freedom to self-express as an artist.

Showpieces can come in many forms, such as wedding cakes, bread sculptures, or even butter sculptures. For a pastry chef who competes, it often comes in two forms – sugar and chocolate. The War General's forte is sugar, which allows him to self-express through food on a "grand scale." Showpieces also serve as "platforms" that springboard him into an immense intimacy tied to his creations. Figure 2 shows an extravagant showpiece of sugar, in which the War General named *Guardian of Nature*. He argued that showpieces are his "playground" where he lets his "imagination take over." To him, a showpiece represents an outcome of his artistic self, something that was "inside" of him that "wants to come out." Unlike desserts, showpieces are "one-dimensional objects" that clearly distinguishes one chefs' mastery of craft from another. With showpieces, the War General is in touch with the artistic realm of the profession in the most enjoyable and rewarding way. He engages with crafts outside the norms of traditional pastry creation or plated desserts, and digs deeper into the wonders of a simplistic ingredient – sugar. In the following subsections, I present the experiential narrative of the War General's most memorable creative moments.



*Figure 2 Guardian of Nature (January 2018)*

### Reanimating the animated: Steampunk Cinderella

To elicit his fondest moment of creativity, I asked the question “what is the most memorable showpiece you’ve ever created?” in which he replied “Steampunk Cinderella,” a gold medal winning piece that re-conceptualizes the fairy tale of Cinderella in a fictional nineteenth century industrial steam-powered era (see Figure 3). The piece brought out the obsessiveness within him to dig deeper into the countless possibilities of sugar. He started by first researching an initial idea to understand the literature associated with steampunk. He only had one outcome in mind, which was to “tell a story.” It starts with an inspiration that sparked curiosity, fueled with obsession, and resembled a “playful journey” in entirety. In particular, he states,

*I found a picture... it was all about 'steampunk'... I started researching about what 'steampunk' was all about... I started to understand that it was a culture that brings everyone back to the nineteenth century... It was a fictional world about the steam energy era... I loved it, I played with it... it gave me room to combine both futuristic and classical elements together.*



*Figure 3 Steampunk Cinderella (September 2013)*

When asked how steampunk was amalgamated with the fairy tale of Cinderella, he shared that he started incorporating “things that he knows he could do best.” Coincidentally it landed on pumpkins, in which he shared,

*This is going to sound weird, but I was really obsessed with the shape of a pumpkin. I don't know why. It's because of the shape; it makes it look so shiny. Unlike most round*



*and smooth objects, a pumpkin has many layers on it. And it is because of all these layers, the reflection of the light is more eye-catching from all angles... I think I was playing with pumpkins for almost half a year... I made a lot of pumpkins, like a lot [the War General laughs and slightly blushes]... (See Figure 4)*



*Figure 4 The pumpkin obsession, from left to right clockwise: Pulled-sugar pumpkin flowers, airbrushed chocolate Jack O'Lanterns, pulled-sugar pumpkins, airbrushed chocolate pumpkins*

One obsession soon led to another, as he continued digging into the trenches of different elements, while also synthesizing each component into one holistic representation. Sequentially, he found an image on Pinterest that resembled a “steampunk themed clock,” playing with the idea in his head, and sketching out renditions on paper, he slowly began to envision a story of Steampunk Cinderella. To him, the synthesis of ideas was perfect, he expressed,

*The Cinderella story needs a clock... 'Because on the stroke of twelve, the spell will be broken,' said fairy godmother... And then, of course the pumpkin came together perfectly, because Cinderella needs a chariot... I started to sketch out my ideas... Of*

*course it wasn't without loads of homework... I did a lot of research about steampunk Cinderella, like the rat, the pumpkin, the colors, everything... I remembered that I didn't want to do the princess at that time, because too many people did the Cinderella lady or the glass shoe. I didn't want to be the same... So I focused on other aspects of the story. So I focused on the pumpkin chariot, the chariot driver, the clock, and the steampunk effect.*

The competition environment was undeniably pressurized, requiring him to “work against the clock.” It was nonetheless, rewarding and fun. The entire experience made him feel like a storyteller. He stressed that he had only one goal in mind, which is to tell his audience a story. “I wanted them to know what steampunk is after viewing my showpiece.” It was about the self-expression through the works of sugar that fueled this creative experience, having a subjective goal in the end, and playing through the likes of possibilities to reach it. The tireless hours spent overtime just for the sake of this artistic endeavor was compensated by the elements of fun and amusement, where “it was not just about the adrenaline and the pressure,” but also about the “fun because [he was] creating.” But more importantly, he was doing it his way.

#### Sketches: “it’s like a mirror for me”

The artistic process does not start at the creation workstation of a pastry kitchen; instead a preliminary visualization process is involved. The War General performs a pre-analysis of his ideas through sketching his imaginations on paper. It resembled a way of “putting a face onto a blurry idea,” that guides as a blueprint for the actual artistic activity. He takes what was seemingly an “idea seed” from his mind, and attempts to communicate it on paper. He analogizes his sketches to a “mirror,” because he is “dressing his showpiece up with different elements,” he goes on and comments that “without this mirror you will never know what it might actually look

like in real life.” In addition, these sketches also serves as a “checklist,” resembling an “agenda,” which helps him make sure that he covers the essential elements that he wants on the end-piece. But at the end, the sketch is “something for you to mirror the final outcome.” For the War General, this preliminary stage is taken to a more extensive level, in which he enlarges his sketches to form a life-size sketch, resembling an actual mirror (see Figure 5). He explains this as a “necessary step in actualizing his creations,” hence it is crucial to “make sure that mirror is accurate.” In his own words,

*This is like a mirror for me (referring to the life-size sketch) ... if I just imagine in my head but I don't sketch it out on paper, chances are, is that I wouldn't be able to produce something quality... For me a sketch is like mirror, it's like seeing what goes well on you in the wardrobe, before actually wearing them out.*



“...without this mirror you will never know what it might actually look like in real life.”

*Figure 5 Preliminary sketch of Steampunk Cinderella*



### ‘The Drizzle’ – Illuminating the curse of the ‘Enchanted Flower’

In asking him his most satisfying creative experience, the War General draw backs on the 2015 World Pastry Cup, in which the Malaysia Pastry Team made history, ranking fourth in the world. The Malaysian Team included Chef Otto and Chef Lawrence. Together, they attempted to bring yet another fairy tale classic to life on the world stage, *Beauty and the Beast*. They illuminated the fictional characters of *Belle*, *The Beast*, *Cogsworth* and *Lumière* on the world stage, while incorporating other supporting elements from the folklore, such as a storybook from the *Beast’s* library, the enchanted flower, as well as the Beast’s castle (see figure 6). Much like the Steampunk Cinderella showpiece, the entire process was built on endless research, chasing down the essence of a story to retell it to an audience.



*Figure 6 Beauty and the Beast (World Pastry Cup, January 2015)*

The War General was tasked with the creation of *The Beast*. Despite finding much joy in his showpiece creation, he instead, pinpoints his most satisfying experience to the creation of a new glazing technique for his *entremet*, in which he describes as the “best dessert of my life.” An *entremet* is a modernistic dessert that bears semblance to a mousse cake with different layers of

textured components. The name of the *entremet* was the *Enchanted Flower*, in which he developed a new glazing technique that reflected a charming striation effect (see Figure 7). The experience was fueled by his forward-thinking mentality, and his “thinking like a scientist” to chase new limits through experiments before showcasing them on the world stage. Despite his hard work, he claims that the technique was born by half accident, as it came to life when unplanned circumstances all came together at the same time. The following excerpts best describe the birth of *The Drizzle*,

*I would say I was lucky to create the glaze because it was an accident... I've tried many ways to make the effect happen... I was using a doughnut-shaped mold. It had to be a doughnut shape with curved edges... If I was using a flat-surfaced mold, 'The Drizzle' would never have been born... Also, I was inspired by an old sugar casting technique, where we flush in a contrasting color into a jug filled with another color... So I flushed one colored glaze into another in a jug, and glazed my cake... I couldn't remember exactly how 'The Drizzle' appeared. Maybe it was because the pastry room was too cold that I started to shiver... and then it 'drizzled' and formed naturally... Because of the curves on the doughnut, it flowed down naturally... the distance between the two contrasting colors flowed in a natural, uniform way... all because my wrist was just going left to right in a shivering body motion.*



Figure 7 'The Drizzle' and the Enchanted Flower (World Pastry Cup, January 2015)

To him, this experience is not only perceived well by the judges, but also by the pastry chef community worldwide. Many, since then, have replicated *The Drizzle*, providing him with the utmost satisfaction, as he feels that he contributed to this line of work. Digging deeper into the conversation, I learned that this experience is most appreciated because there was an artistic element to it. He analogizes the breakthrough as “finding a new way to paint on a canvas.”

#### *Summary of the War General*

The War General's creative experiences began with humble beginnings through the various spatial meanings found in the kitchen. It is there, where he thinks and works like both a scientist and an artist. In particular, it is within the spaces behind kitchen doors that bring out the scientist (the understanding of theory) that supports the artist (allows intuition to dictate and inner

sense to guide artistic movement). In his own words, “one cannot live without another.” This brings up a consideration that there is much interaction between the two personifications and that there is much to understand about the science behind the making of art, and the art behind the understanding of science.

Aiming for new heights, he is one that always seeks new challenges, most likely through professional competitions. He is a strategist that preplans his creations through sketches that resemble mirrors and agendas, while letting his imagination run freely, playing and synthesizing ideas from a central theme that drives him to the point of obsession. He is also a forward thinker who attempts to develop new variations in pastry techniques. Most importantly, he never disregards his principle as a chef. He is wary of his audience and his professional identity. He understands that as a creator, it means to never stop imagining, playing and searching. In particular, he stated the following:

*Many say that, “the day I start to be creative, is the day I stop listening to others,” but I don’t think it’s true. At least for me, I’m totally the opposite... As a chef, I need to be creative but I need to put these creations into the mouths of others. If I just do everything according to what I like, it won’t work, and I need to do something that tackles my audience, while also satisfying myself... I think the only thing that can stop me is myself. If one day my brain stops working, I stop. But I don’t think that the day will come soon. Nothing can stop me to be creative, nothing really... Except for myself... Until the day I die.*

From his exemplar renditions of *Steampunk Cinderella* to the *Enchanted Flower*, the medals on the War General’s well-decorated uniform annotate his past creative experiences from the battlefield. They allow him to relive the moments of joy, sorrows, achievements, and imaginations. And like most war heroes, he has astounding stories to tell.

## Portrait #2: Chef Otto – “The Jester”

Coming from Muar, a small historical town from South Peninsular Malaysia, Chef Otto has endured and stomached the hardship of surviving in a big city at the early age of eighteen. He has lived in shady and unsafe apartments in Kuala Lumpur, while battling everyday life and chasing the glory of a chef’s dream. Battling mental and physical fatigue during his early years, he has even collapse off pure exhaustion, only to be discovered and rescued by an employee from the convenience store downstairs.

Painting his portrait bears semblance to a “Jester” who lives entirely in the present moment. The Jester resembles someone who is obnoxiously playful, sees laughter in darkness, and knows no shame. His professional journey began with his shamelessness in reaching out to one of the best pastry chefs in Malaysia at his prime – Chef Jess. The Jester took the chance, made the phone call, and landed an interview that ultimately led him down his road to the World Pastry Cup. Till today, he dedicates a lot of his success to Chef Jess, who commented that “Otto is one of the most hardworking chefs I’ve ever seen in my life.”

Co-experiencing the disaster that the War General had at the 2013 World Pastry Cup, the shameless Jester noticed that “everyone had a cloud over them,” in which he responded with jokes and laughter to resolve the gloominess of the tragedy. He comforted his team, and even dragged out the War General, who was hiding in the convention hall’s washroom, crying. In particular, he had the following to share,

*One person was missing... that was Chef Tan. He was crying in the toilet... I knew he was crying, but even if we cry, we have to share it together. We shouldn’t suffer by ourselves, we are a team. So, I went looking for him. The convention hall’s toilet was packed. And I just shouted “oi TAN WEI LOON, are you inside...” and he responded in a shivering, crying voice... I was pissed; I swore my lungs out in the toilet. Luckily, not*

*many people understood English in France (laughs). I continued screaming, “You better not be \*\*\*\*ing crying in there. You better come out now and look me straight in the eyes... you better not be crying you \*\*\*\*ing \*\*\*\*\*... if you wanna cry, we gonna cry together... and if you wanna laugh, we gonna laugh together... you better not be crying inside by yourself.” When he came out of the toilet, his eyes were red... and I was like, “you see, you’re crying like a \*\*\*\*\*...” We eventually went to meet up with the rest of the team. The three of us started discussing, and we just talked... we were just grateful that we had each other.*

The Jester is after all, still human. His shamelessness was only a façade for the greater good during the point of sadness. Eventually, he had to face reality.

*When I finally got home... Then only I realize how sad I truly was... when the pictures and the results were released online officially... It was a picture of a full chocolate showpiece and what was left of Vulcan. And I just started crying... there was no one around me... there was no need for me to be the clown or the joker anymore... so I just let it out... (See Figure 8)*



“...It was a picture of a full chocolate showpiece and what was left of Vulcan... there was no need for me to be the clown or the joker anymore... so I just let it out...”

Figure 8 “What was left of Vulcan,” World Pastry Cup 2013 (January 2013)

The creative experiences of the Jester reveal many emotional and uncanny meanings. I divided his creative experiences into two major themes – (1) *creative blessings in disguise* as well as (2) *down the rabbit hole: “interdimensional travels.”*

#### *Theme 1: Creative blessings in disguise*

Coming out from the devastation of the 2013 World Pastry Cup, the Jester and the rest of the team learned a valuable lesson. He provides a brief summary of his creative experience of

Gaia and Vulcan. Reaching an intersecting point of agreement, the War General and the Jester centered on a “mystical warrior” story, with a “humanistic portrayal” of two “abstractive godlike characters battling.” He sees the devastation as a “blessing in disguise,” which provided the team an opportunity to reevaluate themselves. Being a team of young chef competitors at that time, he and his team noticed that they “were overly focused on showpieces,” and that they had forgotten about developing new and exciting flavors for desserts.

### Pandora’s Box

It was after this evaluation, the team and the Jester in particular, shifted their “naïve focus of cool showpieces” to an emphasis on flavor pairing and taste. He draws on one particular experience that best elicits his creativity in taste – a plated dessert, which he named *Pandora’s Box*. The creation was aimed to create an experiential value for those who consume it; he “played with other senses” and added an “emotional touch” to it. There was a story behind the dessert, signifying something mystical, in which he described:

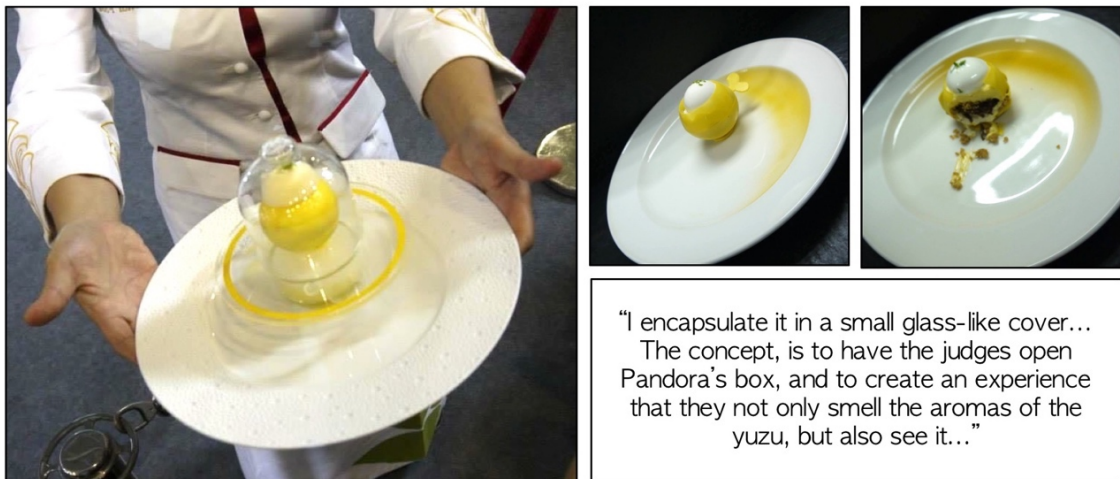
*The entire idea was that I have a plate with shaved dry ice at the bottom, and I will pour some hot yuzu puree onto the dry ice, activating a misty effect... I encapsulate it in a small glass-like cover... The concept is to have the judges open Pandora’s Box, and to create an experience that they not only smell the aromas of the yuzu, but also see it...*

Flavor and taste development is more complicated than those of showpieces. The Jester plays with local native ingredients, constantly experimenting to capture the right texture, temperature, taste, aromas, and appeal. He pays close attention to all the “‘wow’ factors” from past winners of the World Pastry Cup, benchmarking his creation to those who won the title of ‘best plated dessert.’ He recognizes that on each plate, there is a “main actor,” and those



surrounding him should “support and enhance,” without stealing the limelight from the “star” of the dish. Using *Pandora’s Box* as an exemplar of these principles, he had the following to say,

*...We were very happy that we won the title for best plated dessert of Asia! We used... our own Malaysian Banana Emas (Lady Finger Bananas), then yuzu, because Japan won the best plated dessert in the world using that ingredient... we were curious about how Japan utilized it... we wanted to learn from the best... and I still remember the first time I tried it, it was like a hybrid flavor profile of mandarin, passionfruit, lime and lemon... it was so refreshing. And that’s why we wanted to use it to support and enhance our Banana Emas, it was never meant to be used as the main character, otherwise we would have lost our identity as Malaysians. We still used our bananas as our main actor. So, the entire dessert was basically caramelized bananas, mascarpone with yuzu aromas.*



*Figure 9 Pandora's Box, (Asia Pastry Cup, April 2014)*

*Pandora’s Box* resembles a dessert with a story told by the Jester that possesses a harmonious representation of main actors and supporting enhancers. It represents the spirit of nationalism owed to native ingredients, thoughtfully combined with distinct flavor characters, and packaged in an extravagant fashion behind an experiential mystical appeal.

### Decked showpieces and redemption

Showpieces still hold great spatial meanings to the Jester, and it is the failure from the 2013 “nightmare” that led him down the path of greater greatness. The devastation at the 2013 World Pastry Cup fueled the Jester to reevaluate, to think more creatively, and to step out of his comfort zone. He realizes that creativity has no limits, and there is much need for “openness.” He attributed that failures serve as a “wake up call,” that reminds him that “greatness is a never-ending quest.” His team since then adopted a new approach to both designing and executing their showpieces. They, since then, have started “decking their showpieces,” building their artistic products in two or three tiers, before “decking” one on top of another in order to reduce the chances of breakage (See Figure 10).



*Figure 10 "Stromboli," example of a decked showpiece during the (Asia Pastry Cup, April 2014)*

### Separating a creator from a dreamer

To the Jester, creativity means to be open to ideas, which means that one must “refrain from one’s ego,” to not “forget about humility,” and to “take in other people’s comments, ideas,

and suggestions.” He also understands that “creativity must be appreciated,” in which the creation should not only hold meaning to the creator, but also to others. In particular, he states,

*As a chef, our diners are like our spectators, we create for them just like how musicians create for their fans... But, of course, it doesn't mean that you should forget yourself. Your artwork should always be something that is 'you,' so that you're not just a mere mesh-up of opinions. Instead it should be a like a harmonious synthesis of your own identity and your own opinions... The end goal is not only for you, but also acceptance from others... A fine line and fine balance must be achieved for this... So that's why you have to accept the flaws of yourself, and your creativity... you cannot be overly defensive... you have to have a sense of openness and humility to listen to others... then only you can harmoniously put an artwork together.*

Through this view, he understands that his job is meant to bring happiness to others, and not just to himself. It is the “fun” that makes the entire process a “passionate connection.” This passion, however, requires one to actively “seek and move forward,” but most importantly, “take the initiative.” He expressively argues that creativity can come at any time, but it is through the initial step that makes a chef a creator. “If you don't even want to get your hands dirty... nothing will happen... you just have to open your mind, and be receptive... you can suddenly see so much when you expect so little.”

All in all, his views reflect the importance of taking initiative, stressing that if one does not even embark on the journey, nothing will ever be developed. Great ideas come and go all the time, but it is the desire of execution that “separates a creator from a dreamer.” The initiation is of utmost importance, in which he suggests that frustrations and roadblocks will always occur.

*Creativity is something with no direct path, there is nothing laid out for you. You may start point A, thinking that you will walk to point Z... But then you skip a few alphabets,*

*you end up lost in the forest. You may even jump course from alphabets to numerals, hitting to point 1, 2, 3... and all of a sudden you figured everything out and arrive at your destination.*

It is this thrust that triggers a desire, with no direct path, through a non-linear, free-flowing incubation process, that would hopefully lead a chef to his/her final destination.

### *Theme 2: Down the rabbit hole – “Interdimensional travels”*

All initiations begin with an idea. To the Jester, these ideas are only obtainable through openly seeking creative experiences. In this theme, I present something “supernatural” about the Jester, where he “spaces out,” “travels to a new dimension,” and “leaves his surrogate body behind.” This representation mirrors a tumble down a rabbit hole filled and fueled with imagination; the only thing missing is a white rabbit with a pocket watch.

#### Traveling to a new dimension

The Jester has a unique sense of describing his creative experiences, of which he descriptively depicts as a “journey to another world.” This starts with his desire to source out creative experiences. This can take place in ordinary activities like window shopping or a walk in the park. He starts with nothing on his mind, but through his unique sensitivity, he experiences an ignition, where he “spaces out” into a world of wonders. He calls this world “another dimension,” where he allows his imagination to run freely. But awkwardly, his “surrogate body” is left behind in the real world, performing obscure gestures while his mind wonders off in an alternate reality. In this alternate reality, he is equipped with an “imaginative pencil and sketchbook,” in which he would start drawing in the air out in the open. He calls this “creating.” He narrates,

*It was my girlfriend who pointed this out to me. Sometimes we will window shop together... and all of a sudden I will stare at something, it could be a mannequin, jewelry, a poster, a random flyer... and then I will space out, I will start drawing in the air... I will look at that particular item... and I would just start picturing what I can do with it... by drawing in the air, with an imaginative frame like a sketchbook in front of me... and an imaginative pencil and I will start 'drafting in my mind' on how to incorporate that item into a showpiece or a product. I will start drawing the flow... I will start imagining other components on it... and my left hand will start bounding and framing the sketch together (he performs a L-shape gesture with his left hand, like how a photographer would when framing a scenery)... [While] my right hand will continue to draw in the air... I'm pretty sure many other people who saw me would think I am crazy... but I'm actually creating.*

This journey is often interrupted by a slap on the back by his girlfriend, which brings him back to reality. He exclaims that he “needs to imagine,” and “needs to enter that world,” because he would never know “when and where the next one may come.” He describes the “exit” of these occurrences to be like “waking up from a dream... and your cloud bubble above your head bursts and disappears... and then you wake up in reality... and just like a dream, you forget many parts of it.”

Unlike daydreaming though, it is through his “sketches in the air” where he remembers essential elements from his short trip to the “‘other’ world.” He would then take quick action, writing it down in a notebook he carries around daily, or record it down on his cellphone, all of which he keeps and “never deletes” in a library of documented ideas. Figure 11 shows a depiction of a photo album stored on his iCloud entitled ‘Ideas,’ which comprises of images stripped from the internet or taken from his journey to the other dimension.

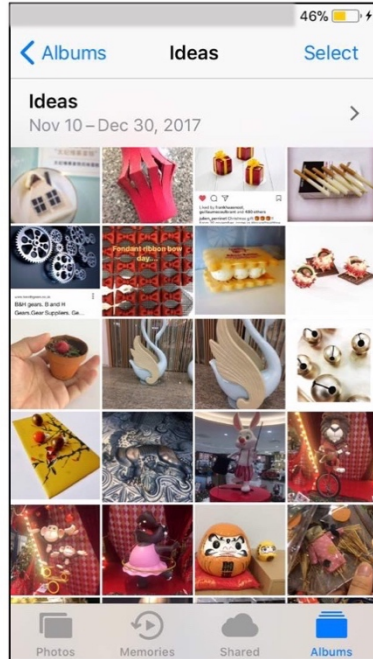


Figure 11 Photo album entitled 'Ideas'

### The Marble Story

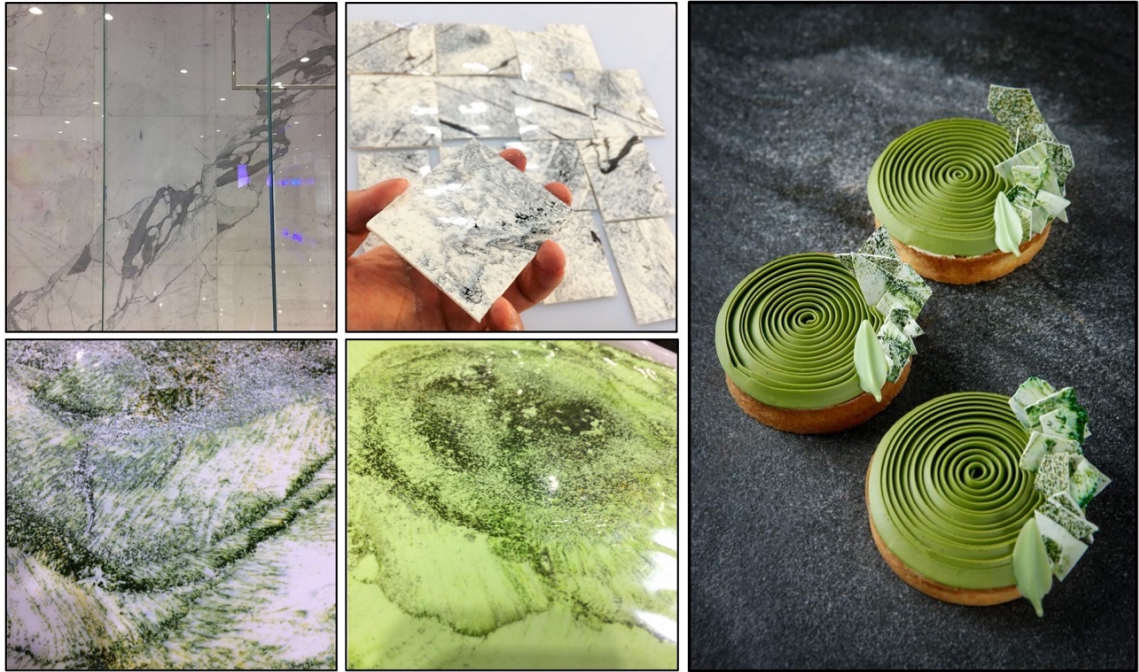
Documenting ideas maybe an easy first step, but it is the innate desire to create and construct that separates him from those of ordinary dreamers. The documentation allows him to record details vividly and portray accurately through desserts or showpieces. *The Marble Story* is one of many examples that illuminate his creation journey starting from his “interdimensional travels” to the actualization in the kitchen. Again, it starts with his unique sensitivity of seeing the world, in which he was attracted by a backdrop resembling a marble piece. He states,

*I was shopping with her (his girlfriend)... I never liked shopping or walking around in malls in the past, but now I love to do it... because it will bring me to the most random of spaces... my girlfriend would love to look at branded bags and purses... and most of the time, I would be staring at the designs around the product... So, we were window shopping, and I was suddenly attracted by a display case... I walked towards the store... it was a [luxury bag] store... I was staring at their display case... and I told my girlfriend*

*“hey this is beautiful...” and she was very happy... and she asked me “are you gonna buy that for me?” she was referring to the bag inside of the display case... and coldheartedly I just said... “Nope... I was talking about the background, that marble backdrop is beautiful... Her face changed and she rolled her eyes... and in a very sarcastic tone she said “don’t you know how to do that yourself?” She’s right... So I did it...*

The marble backdrop idea was then brought to the kitchen for experimentation and play, where he referenced old chocolate techniques in new and modernistic ways. He started building the marble layer by layer, without compromising the shine of perfectly tempered chocolate. In particular, he starts by first sprinkling a layer of dark cocoa powder on a sheet of acetate, followed by piping zigzags or spirals of grey cocoa butter on top, and lastly spread across the frame with white tempered chocolate. What proceeded after is of elegance, as he remarkably created marbled-pieces of chocolates. Figure 12 shows the outcome of the marbling technique alongside a picture of the backdrop taken at the luxury bag store, in which he then varied the colors transforming to bear semblance to green jades.





*Figure 12 The Marble Story, from left to right clockwise: Picture of marble backdrop from the luxury store, the marble effect, garnishing the dessert “Zen” with the marbled chocolate pieces, jade, green marble*

### *Summary of the Jester*

The Jester is a playful soul that creates comedy in misery, but still remains critical and forward thinking to improve oneself through past failures. He embraces local ingredients, benchmarks against the best from the world, and adds an experiential touch to his creations. He distinguishes that in a plated dessert, there should be a “main actor,” and those surrounding that actor should “support and enhance” without stealing the limelight from the “star” of the dish. Moreover, he learns from past mistakes and develops safer techniques to execute showpieces given his 2013 devastating experience.

The Jester recognizes that anyone can be creative, but not everyone is a “creator.” What separates one from another is effort to initiate action from his inspirations. He explains that it is this initiative that starts a non-linear, free-flowing incubation process that would hopefully lead



one to creative outputs. He possesses a unique sensitivity that brings him into the world of imaginations, in which he “spaces out,” “travels to a new dimension,” and “leaves his surrogate body behind.” He derives inspiration from ordinary and mundane, allowing him to transform them into art. But seeing is not merely enough; it is the innate desire inside of him to create and construct, that turns his imaginations into reality.

The Jester is a career friend and creative partner to the War General, best of friends, and craziest of imaginers. The Jester’s next goal is to put his name in stone, and to leave a legacy behind for young Malaysian pastry chefs to follow. He explains that,

*One day I will think back and ask myself ‘what legacy am I leaving behind for the next generation of chefs?’ Even when I’m crowned champions of Asia before... I still want to go for it again... why not? I’m not done yet... There is still a lot of gas left in my creative tank... so why not keep going forward and think of new ways to do things? I don’t want to look back and have regrets... I don’t want to be some elderly person who always advises people to fight for their dreams but failed to do so himself. We have to wake up and push ourselves every day... that waking up stage is always hard to initiate, and it’s hard to start the engine, but once it is warmed up... it will keep going... you will get obsessed with it and you won’t stop... but if you don’t take the initial step... then nothing is gonna happen... it’s as simple as that...*

### Portrait #3: Chef Lawrence Bo – “The Mad Scientist”

“He is a last-minute thinker, and has the evilest of ideas, but he is after all, a natural born artist,” claims the War General when he commenting about Chef Lawrence. Choosing to join the profession for all the wrong reasons, Lawrence enrolled himself into a chef’s career because of the perceived “coolness” of the chef uniform. It was because he could “dress up like a

professional” and “play with food” that enticed him to pursue an education in pastry/food sciences. However, upon entry to the industry, he was greeted by an autocratic head chef, who ran the kitchen in oppressive fashion that made Lawrence reevaluate his attitude towards his sprouting career. The head chef instilled brigade-like values of strict discipline and autocracy, which have in entirety, shaped Chef Lawrence’s views of the culinary world for the greater good.

His rise to fame reflects a playful and experimental pathway of a “Mad Scientist,” in which he is, in many ways like a regular scientist, but not restricted by formulas and procedures. His thinking reflects a commonality found in many scientifically motivated villains, thinking overly outside of the box, and at times, making questionable decisions regarding food and ethics. Like a regular scientist, he has a mastery of prior literature associated to his field of work, but challenges every theory frantically. The Mad Scientist’s imagination is out of the ordinary, as he does not work according to norms. He is in a league of his own, which earned him the title of *World’s Best Chocolate Showpiece* in 2015’s World Pastry Cup. Taking pride from the title, he highly depends on his inner intuitions, and dislikes anything preplanned; instead, prefers to let things come together spontaneously through an intuitive self-expression. One can only imagine of what goes on in his mind when looking at his creations, as they often instill fear and spookiness, which often leaves an unforgettable mark in our memory stems.

The Mad Scientist’s culinary creativity experiences are themed into two major categories – (1) *the creative darkness within* and (2) *mad scientist or mad artists?*

#### *Theme 1: The creative darkness within*

Novelty is key to the Mad Scientist. He never rests on something that has been done before, and looks forward for new variations. He claims to “never repeat what was done before” and is always in a vigorous self-reflection of “forcing oneself to think about something new.”

Creativity to him means to produce “something unexpected” and “unimaginable to the common mind.” His showpieces are the best example of this, in which he claims “if it is not new, I won’t show it to the world.” Only through this school of thought, he then believes that he would not be compared to the likes of others. But rather, he introduces new benchmarks for the rest of the world to follow.

### Dark and evil showpieces

Novelty to him resembles going against the norm and to “do it his way.” He embraces darker art renderings, preferably portraying antagonism that many others would not. He asserts that too many chefs create showpieces that are based off of ikebana and floral themes, which makes one indistinguishable from another. He instead, prefers to play with chocolate’s natural darkness, portraying realistic, rustic, and coarse textures, and to “never taint it” with additional artificial colorings. In short, he stays true to the natural colors of chocolate, preserving its integrity in its more natural state, while going in depth into as many details as possible.

Like the War General, he constantly pursues new challenges, and dives into the world of fiction and fantasy. In contrast, the Mad Scientist stays away from the “protagonist focus” in his designs, and prefers to play with something “scary,” “evil,” and “fearful.” Moreover, he loves modeling figurines with facial expressions, as they provide him a greater connection with his artwork that creates an “emotional conversation” during the creative process. Figure 13 showcases some of his favorite showpieces based off his philosophy of creativity. They depict something against the norm, portraying “antagonism,” while focusing on natural colors of dark, milk, and white chocolates using as limited additional coloring as possible.



*Figure 13 The Mad Scientist's Dark and Evil Showpieces, from left to right: Sarah Kerrigan (April 2012), Maleficent (March 2018)*

#### Sketches versus “freestyle expression”

One item near and dear to the Mad Scientist would be a sketchbook, an item that he claims to “never leave home without.” It allows him to externalize ideas with a visual, while also acting as a tool to show others what he is thinking. This enables him to obtain feedback and communicate with others based on what is conveyed. It also serves as a “journal” to him, allowing him to spontaneously record sudden sparks of inspirations as they come. Figure 14 shows two pages of his personal sketchbook, alongside their actualized showpieces.



Figure 14 Sketch of the Joker (October 2017) & La sorcière à steampunk (August 2017)

However, he persists that a sketch is nothing but a mere guide, and admits that intuition still dictates the finalization of his products. He describes this as a “freestyle expression” where he “lets the fun takeover.” At times, he prefers not to sketch at all, because he feels that sketches commit him to follow a pre-planned idea. On occasions, he would build ideas based off his current state of ‘creativity’ and ‘feelings,’ improvising as he goes in the kitchen. He discusses, that if one were to sketch out an idea, chances are high that he/she would “follow the sketch as it is.” Instead, he debates that some of the most joyful creative experiences come from expressions “without a plan,” which allows him to “feel every touch as it comes” and “go with the flow.” He shared one particular innately rewarding experience based off this principle – *The Goblin*, where he animated a comic book villain using nothing but chocolate. He started with a block of chocolate and an oval shape, working intuitively and modeling it “as it comes.” To date, he recognizes *The Goblin* as one of the most satisfactory self-expression of himself (see Figure 15).



*Figure 15 The Goblin (November 2017)*

*Theme 2: Mad scientist or mad artist?*

Interestingly, the Mad Scientist differentiates a pastry chef from those of hot cooking chefs. He claims that hot cooking chefs are more engaged in the “art of cooking” where intuition guides the “seasoning to taste,” “the finishing of a sauce,” or “how much cooking wine to add

into a broth.” They look to develop a “harmonious composition of flavors and temperature.” Whereas pastry chefs on the other hand, are more scientific in nature, as it requires much knowledge behind “how different ingredients and different weightages of each ingredients” influence the final outcome. He explains that the process is much more reliant on theories, understanding, and “scales with one or two decimal points,” rather than intuitive “judging by instinct” or “to taste.” Although the intuitive aspect is less likely to occur in pastry production due to the meticulousness found in every step of the process, he still insists, that the outcome remains an art. In this theme, I lay out the Mad Scientist perspectives of how “the art comes into play” on a matter that he resonates to be highly scientific.

#### “Bringing a story to the guest”

To the Mad Scientist, pastry is more associated with stories and experiential values. A pastry chef is often tasked with creating something artistic to enhance a buffet or to “bring out an atmosphere.” This can come in the forms of wedding cakes, showpieces, or merely an artistic arrangement of a buffet setup. He stresses that “pastry chefs need to bring a story to the guest.” It is not all about the cooking procedure at times; it is more about the ‘wow’ and emotional factor tied to the output. The Mad Scientist claims this “storytelling” to resemble “poetry,” which helps heighten the work of a pastry chef to “another level,” bringing more value and satisfaction to their work. It is also because of a pastry chef’s tendency to play with poetries and stories that makes a pastry kitchen environment less chaotic compared to hot-cooking environment. He states,

*These artistic things are like joy, because we sketch, we design, we have fun... I can say that most pastry chefs are playing... even if he is a strict chef, he can still be playing... This is something that I don't really see in most culinary chefs (hot cooking chefs), they are always in a rush in the kitchen... For me, I'm having fun, all the time I'm playing.*

*Even at work... some people will ask me 'Chef, what are you doing?' 'Oh, I'm just trying something new... or I'm just having fun.'*

He also expresses that because of chocolate and sugar, there are endless opportunities to play with designs, which makes “telling a story” more fun and unrestrained. Hence, he is always looking at new concept arts and folklores, trying to find inspirations and flavors associated to those literatures, and finally illuminating it in one melodious dessert piece.

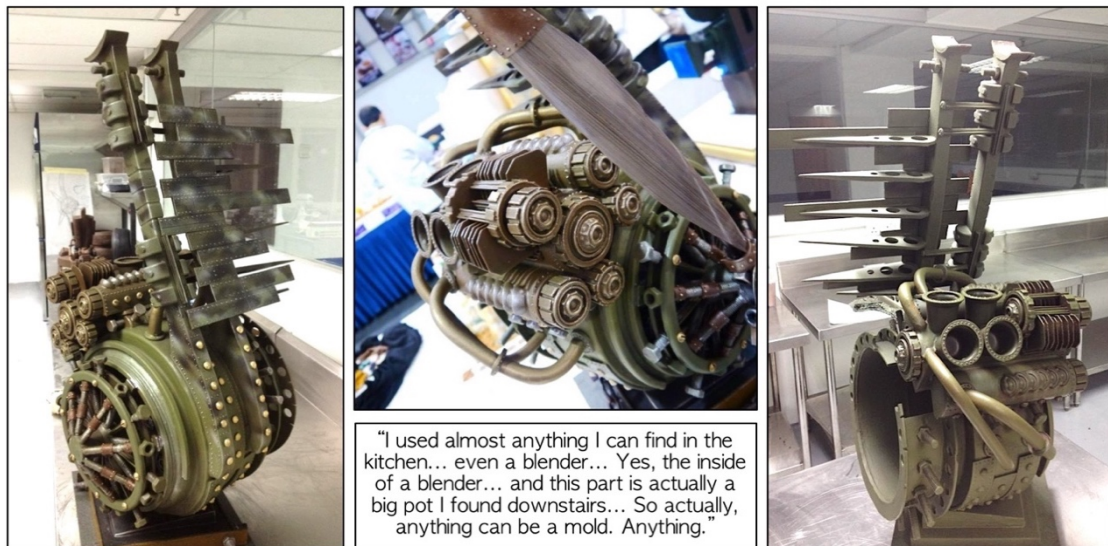
#### The science (“Mad”) behind the making of art

Much alike the War General, the Mad Scientist emphasizes strongly on understanding the scientific nature of ingredients. It is through a mastery of essential concepts and information on the subject matter, is he only able to manifest in creativity in an artistic fashion. The Mad Scientist’s strong suit is in chocolate, in which he developed various new ways of playing with it. He has his own way of working with chocolate that is different from textbook methods, and is against dependence on silicone molds and thermoform technology (a mold making device). Instead he uses the most unorthodox of kitchen tools and everyday items as molds for chocolate. Some of which, his counterparts referred to as “impossible,” “crazy,” and “mad,” such as the inside of a blender, a stock pots, egg trays, and even nuts and bolts from a garage toolbox. He is inspired by the most outlandish of shapes found in everyday items, as he constantly looks for ways to play with them. Admittedly, he noted that some worked better than others, as his curiosity came in the expense of “a lot of mess,” especially with chocolate. Figure 16 best elicits a creation made from merely everyday kitchen tools and utensils. In which he states,

*A lot of people know how to play with chocolate... But many only know how to cast chocolate into silicone molds or use thermoform technology to make their own plastic molds. This showpiece (referring to Figure 15), shows that if you understand chocolate*



*inside and out, then anything can be a mold... I used almost anything I can find in the kitchen... even a blender... Yes, the inside of a blender... and a big pot I found downstairs... As long as you understand the temperature of the object and the viscosity of your chocolate, anything can be a mold... anything.*



*Figure 16 “Anything can be a mold” – The Aviator's Engine (September 2013)*

The Mad Scientist’s fondness for unorthodox ways of creating often resulted in disputes from his colleagues at work, claiming that it is too “crazy,” while others accused him of being “mad.” But he remains steadfast that this is the very essence of his creativity, which is to never limit possibilities.

#### Illumination – a “sensitive calculation of various variables”

The ‘madness’ behind the Mad Scientist’s way of thinking is still motivated a need to bring things together harmoniously. He explains that there is “more to pastry than what meets the eye” in his creations. Particularly, he takes into account various “chemistry” involved in the

production process, while also “managing the various senses” during the point of consumer consumption. Specifically, he claims that the making of ice-cream cakes is arguably the most difficult of products that requires a pastry chef to be wary of both “chemical reactions” in production and also “senses management in consumption.” To the Mad Scientist, an “extravagant ice-cream cake” requires not only ice-cream, but other frozen items all assembled and “layered” into one “harmonious cake.” It goes beyond flavor combinations, but more to the understanding of temperature and texture tied to each component. He describes,

*For an ice-cream cake, it doesn't mean that is only just ice cream... it's a combination of frozen items layered together artistically. You need to understand and calculate the sweetness and texture... I would always put my ice-cream layer outside, followed by sorbet, and lastly parfais at the core, because of the defrosting time... because parfait defrosts faster, that's why it is in the core... while sorbet and ice cream can wrap around it...*

He goes on to share that ice-cream cakes considers not only the serving temperature, textures, flavors, and appeal, but also the defrosting time, sugar content and fat content. He claims that it is a very “sensitive calculation of various variables” to produce something that is “smooth and creamy” and not “icy and solid,” across all layers, all in which considers a chef’s “showmanship.” He shares,

*When cutting into your cake, it shouldn't be solid; you should still be able to cut with ease. Not only that, it should be very colorful inside and the layering have to be very clear to your consumer. You should be able to distinguish one layer from another. Because, in a way, we still eat with our eyes first... It requires showmanship that activates a surprise when cutting into the cake.*

Figure 17 shows an ice-cream cake named *Illumination*, a product that he developed for the 2015 World Pastry Cup. Going through more than fifty trials, the cake represents one of the most intrinsically rewarding desserts he has ever made. From the development of flavor, using Malaysian ingredients, to the candlelight designs inspired by *Lumière* from *Beauty and the Beast*, *Illumination* is one creation that stems deeply in his mind, reminding him of great difficulty that requires his utmost attention to “all possible sensitive variables.”



*Figure 17 Illumination: Coconut streusel base, vanilla and kalamansi lime parfait, mango yuzu sorbet, strawberry confit, and coconut ice-cream (World Pastry Cup, January 2015)*

In short, he describes that without an artistic touch, a chef is no more than a producer of food. But with it, the chef would then join the likes as one of the “divines” of the profession. He analogically states that a pastry chef has to work like both an architect and a designer, where one have to learn how to plan and build a structure up where its foundations and composition would hold, but still gift-wrap it in an appealing fashion.

### *Summary of the Mad Scientist*

Named “evil, mad and crazy” by his own colleagues, the Mad Scientist’s name echoes in everyone as an individual with the most unorthodox of imaginations. Instead of creating designs that portrays joyful themes, he does it his way by pursuing darkness, and portraying antagonism. He dislikes preplanning his ideas, and prefers to “play on the spot,” letting his inner senses manifest unrestrictedly in a spontaneous and free-flowing fashion. He calls this a “freestyle expression,” which ties him to some of the most enjoyable and emotionally rewarding outputs he has ever created.

Much like the War General, the artistry behind his creativity is still grounded by scientific rationalism. He enjoys telling stories and bringing things together in a poetic form, but still possesses a mastery of scientific understandings. Describing the process of pastry creations as a “sensitive calculation of various variables,” the Mad Scientist’s experimentations are deduced down to grams and milliliters in every test-tube. He insists that the output is still an art, requiring “showmanship.” He describes that without an artistic touch, a chef is no more than a producer of food. However, with it, he is one of the “divines” of the profession.

### Portrait #4: Breadpitt – “The Survivor”

Parodying the Hollywood actor, Brad Pitt, Breadpitt’s creativity has been described by his counterparts as “playful,” “cunning,” and “unimaginable.” His journey into the world of pâtisserie started with his entry to pastry school with high school credentials that were close to nothing. Taking a chance in learning a craft, he felt a passionate, joyful connection as a culinary student. It was an inner calling for him and a language that he could relate to. As a young culinary student, he was driven by passion, and often took what he had learned from classes back home for further experimentation and play. He speaks of many instances of him “having fun” in his

mother's kitchen, which resembles his "first playground," only to be banned from it due to excessive mess.

This tale of playful innocence, would however, be followed in much pain and agony. His career did not begin in the best of circumstances. Joining a highly deskilled and commercialized segment of the pastry production industry, what was supposed to be a playful, passionate job turned into one where he was merely a 'body' on an assembly line. Thus, I have given him the alias as 'the Survivor,' as he was betrayed by the industry upon entry. It took a toll on him, draining him of his curiosity and passion, which endingly emptied his engine of passion. Luckily for him, he escaped the trenches, and dived into the sunnier sectors that embraced the art and craft of a chef. However, those negative experiences left a hefty scar on him, reminding him of the sufferings and agonies. Today he stands as a creative elite of in the global pastry community, representing Malaysia on several prestigious occasions, which includes the World Pastry Cup in 2017. During my renditions of his portrait, it was difficult to shy away from the notations of his "scars." He has gone through much suffering during his early years, but they ultimately, shape him as one of the best in the country, in Asia, and the world.

Breadpitt's culinary creativity experiences are more often than not shaped by his remembrance of his sufferings, I themed them into two major categories – (1) *scars of creative healing* and (2) *'uncreative creativity.'*

### *Theme 1: Scars of creative healing*

Upon introducing himself, Breadpitt persists that he is "uncreative," "a slow learner," with "no gifts as an artist." He compares himself to his counterparts (i.e., the War General, the Jester, and the Mad Scientist) and suggests that he could only hide in the shadows of their creative capacity. He continuously draws back on how the industry drained him, and that he

entered an “abyss,” which he describes as a dark side of the industry that should not exist for humane reasons. He calls this a “black hole” that he tumbled in, which scarred and disfigured him. Despite escaping the darkness, he knows that no matter what, there is still one segment of the industry that thrives on “slavery,” where chefs are used as machines, performing “tedious,” “idiotic,” “low brain,” “robotic,” “repetitive,” and “meaningless” work. All in which, was rewarded with an “embarrassing paycheck” worth only 800 Ringgit Malaysia (\$200) a month.

“I was rotting there.” That was all he could say. Fueled by a misguided child’s frustrations, he took his career for granted, skipping work, violating policies, and avoiding the workplace in entirety. He was beyond “burnout,” and was excruciatingly unmotivated, hitting rock-bottom. The industry betrayed him; what was supposed to be an exciting profession filled with self-expression, became one of slavery to business owners who could care less for the craft of a pastry chef. The kitchen can be a daunting place to the Survivor. He views it as a place of slavery, drawing experiences from his past work life where chefs were treated as nuts and bolts. There was no room to manifest creativity; neither was it “a place to play,” because “play is punishable at work place.”

#### The book of creative healing

Crying poverty, the Survivor’s only affordable form of entertainment was going to the bookstore. During his breaks at work, he would spend time flipping through the pages of complimentary books on display, and was fortunate enough to pick up a book that rejuvenated his passion. He calls this book “the book that changed his life” that started a “healing process” for his wounds from the industry (see Figure 18). The book showed him “a glimpse of light” to the pastry career that he supposedly signed up for. He was bombarded with colorful images, complicated flavor combinations, and wondrous cake layers showcased in the “book of creative

healing.” This triggered a new calling, vibrating his creative soul to reroute his career course. With a couple of fortunate events, he was blessed with an opportunity to switch employers, joining a company that better embraced the craftsmanship of a pastry chef.



*Figure 18 The book of creative healing*

Today, this book serves as a token reminder of his salvation from the gutters of “rotting.” He describes his keepsake as a “book with a soul,” that he still keeps in his office. This memento reminded his previous deplorable working conditions. It also helped him embrace his inner artist. These scars today, are no longer sufferings, but signs of healing. In the present day, he possesses a “library of knowledge,” a collection of books over the years that serve as a basis of inspiration. At the very end of his bookshelf, lies the book that initiated everything – “the book of creative healing.”

*Theme 2: 'Uncreative creativity'*

The healing helped him pursue greater knowledge during his darkest of times, but still, he insists that he does not belong to a class of creators. "I'm not creative," he claims,

*My creativity data based on my experience... I never do anything new, I just put puzzle pieces together... you may think that I'm creative because of my profile, but reality is, I'm just reapplying and twisting old knowledge.*

He claims that chefs are nothing but humble craftsmen who "foolishly act as artists." He asserts that if one claims to have created something, he/she merely reflects naivety, because one does not know the original source of creativity. In totality, one has a modest view of himself/herself as a creator, despite partaking in the most prestigious pastry competition that promotes each participant's creativity globally. He states,

*I'm not creating; I'm just reapplying what is available... I have to admit that it is easier to find inspiration today than before; there are so many social media platforms that share artwork and pictures... No, I'm not creative; I don't see myself as an admired person... So please don't call me an artist.*

There was a focus on the term "craft" rather than "create" for the Survivor. In describing how he "crafts," he suggests that it means "to produce something new" and to refrain from copying. He admits that he had copied and imitated chefs who were publicizing their creations. Idolizing these personas, he trained himself to think like them, and understand how they synthesize ideas and how they "create." He managed to "dumb it down" to a simplistic pattern of "copying from faraway sources," and "knowing how to hide them." Applying what he learned, he insists that he is "indirectly copying," in which he builds off what he knows based on the library of knowledge that he has in hand, while also hiding his sources as cleverly as possible. He believes that this forward thinking mentality is essential, but more importantly, it has to be



initiated and carried forward through actual steps of action. He ends this discourse emphasizing, that he is not creative; all he does is “staying ahead of the game.”

### The uncreative disability

Staying true to his word, the Survivor steadfastly shies away from the word “creative.” Neither does he prefer the word “play,” because it resonates as a term “punishable at the work place.” He instead, synthesizes and adopts the wildest of ideas from different areas and art forms onto food. He sees distinct colors and shapes in everyday items and records them down using photography or in a notebook. Unlike his counterparts, he has an inability to sketch or draw despite having the images of his intended outcomes projecting in his mind. He refers to this as a psychomotor “disability,” and was even laughed at for not possessing the artistic capacity of putting a pencil onto a sketch. In defending his “disability” he states,

*Maybe it's because I'm lazy, or I'm just giving myself excuse not to draw... but I really can't, I'm not the artsy kind of person... I have the visual in my head, but I couldn't somehow draw it out like them (referring to his counterparts) but actually, it's quite difficult for me. It's like a... it's like a disability for me, because if you can't sketch, it's quite difficult to plan. I just don't know why I couldn't draw, I have the visual in my mind...it's in there, but I couldn't draw it... I just don't know why.*

Claiming not to be artistic, the outcomes of his desserts and showpieces suggest otherwise. More often than not, these outcomes possess no formal planning through sketches. This is because sketching limits his possibilities by figuratively “having both his hands tied up.” Eliminating the sketch from the creative process, it allows him to be more “free and easy,” permitting him to “go with the flow,” and improvise as his ideas comes along. He finds greater joy in crafting petite gateaux and modern *entremets*, which he often garnishes with hints of

imagination inspired by everyday objects. Figure 19 shows a collection of some of his most “uncreative” desserts.



*Figure 19 From top to bottom, left to right: The Madame, Grapefruit Santa, Buche Noel sofa*

Despite being embarrassed about his inability to draw, he remains determined to keep a sketchbook to document his ideas. He claims that the sketchbook’s intention is not to emphasize on his ability to draw, but it is a way to “take small actions” on the inspirations that come to mind. “It is a way to document ideas,” and allowing ideas in an embryonic stage to incubate in the pages of his sketchbooks, only to be revisited with “a pair of fresh eyes” in the future. By looking through these pages from a fresh perspective, past jottings and scribbles may trigger a chain of new ideas resembling to what he calls “Pinterest in his head,” where his mind would diverge in search of new imageries based off existing records. Today, his sketchbook encompasses a great variety of ideas waiting to be animated in the future, all kept closely to himself as a humble, “uncreative” craftsman.

“Screw traditions!”

Worshipping past knowledge and treating them as laws of pastry infuriates the Survivor. He appreciates the science behind crafting pâtisserie, but abstains to remain within its boundaries. He hates the term “supposed,” and favors to “break every rule possible” in actualizing his craft. He uses one of his showpiece ideas as an example of this. He first explains that it is in sugar’s very tradition that its outcome should resemble something “shiny, transparent, and vibrantly colored, all attached onto a core with a curvy/flowy movement.” He explains that spectators and judges like to see a “flowy S-shaped movement” in showpieces, rather than a constructed building stacked together from the bottom up. “Screw traditions!” he exclaimed, “rules are meant to be broken.” Fueled by this ideology, he crafted a showpiece that broke every single aforementioned “rule.” He constructed the *Aviator* showing no glimpse of transparency, playing with dull colors, and that were “stacked together” (See Figure 20). He asks the question of “why stick to norms that are centuries old?” Going through countless frustrations putting the *Aviator* together, he eliminated various instances of “supposedly,” and ended his description of his showpiece with a simple statement, “screw traditions!”

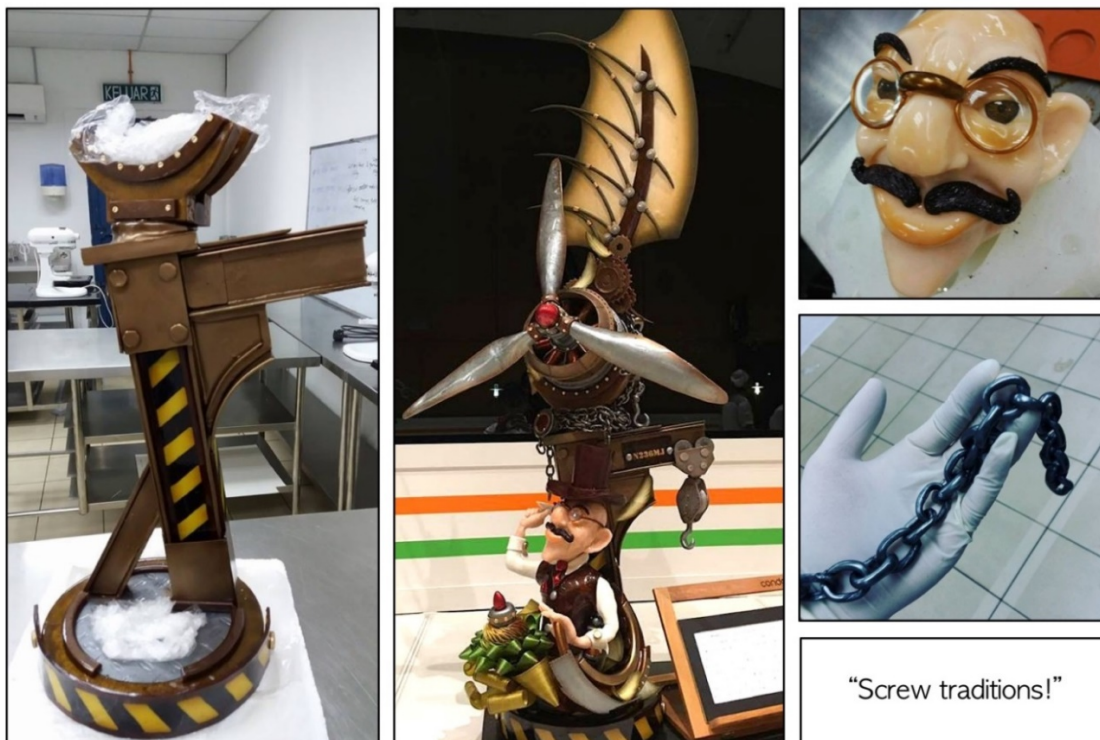


Figure 20 *The Aviator* (September 2017)

### *Summary of the Survivor*

The over-industrialized side of the industry left a noticeable scar on Breadpitt's creative identity. Nonetheless, it shaped and built a charismatic character that would otherwise not exist. The Survivor is unlike any other chefs in this study, as he has gone through the most chaotic of experiences in which he termed as "slavery," and described it as an unimaginable "black hole" and "abyss." It was a shady area of the industry that strives on lowly paid chefs placed on an assembly line performing meaningless work. It resembles a place where chefs' aspirations and creative engines were demolished before it could be put into use. He was saved by knowledge and curiosity. It was a calling from a book that reminded him of the outside world, causing him to change course towards a route of creative healing.

He has a distinct demeanor that sets him apart from the rest of his counterparts, as his creative persona shows clear images of his scars from the past. Thinking differently from others, he contemplates that a true craftsman should not acquire knowledge for the sake of replication, but rather challenge its traditions to plunge deeper into its meanings and limits. He is inspired by everyday objects, which allows his creative spirit to live on through his animated desserts and pastries. He stays true to his words, puts his soul into action, and leads by example. More importantly, he embraces his flaws and “disabilities,” laughing them off and argues that it is a unique feature that makes him exceptional. His counterparts are often left in awe when discussing the Survivor’s inability to draw, but capacity to imagine and craft. One in which stated,

*Not everybody is good in drawing... not everybody is good in music... but if you just say drawing and music is the key to be creative, then what is [Breadpitt]? Look at him... he cannot draw to save his life... but look at his output! Look at the desserts he can make... look at the showpieces he produces... he couldn't even sketch an idea out on paper... but look at his end product! It's amazing! You won't even believe that he couldn't draw... if you ask him to describe his idea to you... he can't even do so in words... but when he gets behind a sugar lamp, it's magic... Not everybody is creative in the same way. He is just so imaginative, but he cannot convey it on paper, neither in words. But when he expresses through pastry and through showpieces, then you see his inner self... you'd never see this in anything other thing he do unless he touches pastry... its quite amazing.*

- The Jester

## *Chapter Summary*

This chapter reports the creative experiences of four individuals, who were described by their peers to be in their primes. Despite being the best of friends who collaborates on a frequent basis, their creative personas and views of reality are distinct and different. To start with, the space of the kitchen seem to represent different meanings to each individual, as some reckoned that it was a place of despair and where “play is punishable at work place,” whilst others see an abundance of opportunities that sparked to their creative curiosity. These nuances in the kitchen’s spatial meanings are brought to light by their personal encounters with creativity as well as their individualized journeys of becoming a chef, as some came from more chaotic environment than others.

Nonetheless, similar across the four portraits were the outcomes of creativity, which revolved around two major forms of creations – desserts and showpieces. Their process of achieving these creations varies according to their personas, experiences, philosophical stance of creativity, and also their dealings with everyday practices and values. One artifact similar across all four chefs is a sketchbook, acting as a setting of creative beginnings in which pastry chefs document flashes of ideas that come to mind. Some of these chefs take their sketches more seriously than others, where they expand their parameters to resemble a “mirror,” whilst others treat them as no more than a guide that facilitates their creative process. Each of them underwent their most memorable creative experience in dissimilar situations, which ranges from leisure activities outside of the workplace to the pressures instilled by professional competitions. However, it is rare to witness such experiences originating in the kitchen, as most of them take place in spaces away from the hustling environment of the chaotic kitchen.

They narrate their creative outputs with much connectivity to the creative process. From the inspiration to the finalization, they are highly attached in the odyssey of creation that mimics

a storyteller or a poet, narrating their voyages in rhythmic fashion line-by-line, sonnet-by-sonnet. Some described their creative process as an inspirational journey into folklores and fairytales, whereas others are inspired by everyday objects in everyday places. Nonetheless, they speak of their process as if they were revisiting them in full joy. In short, their creations reflect pieces of themselves externalized onto a work of art, whereby each chapter of the creative endeavors reflects a piece of themselves, resembling an enjoyable, unforgettable, and illustrious experience. Moreover, the interaction with their creative experience resembles much personification to different imageries of themselves. They conceptualize themselves to different personifications, by intertwining and encapsulating bundles of imageries that represent a rhetoric of why they do what they do. Specifically, they metaphorically announce themselves as “artists,” “storytellers,” “poets,” “dimension travelers,” “performers,” “scientists,” “chemists,” “slaves,” and “non-traditionalists.” To them it is these epitomes that give meaning to the work they do, and thus allowing them to engage in a more intimate and sensual linkage to the creative experience.

The portraits of these four extraordinary personnel bring us to a midway point in illuminating the creative experiences of Malaysian’s elite pastry chefs. In the coming chapter, I present the portraits of five other chefs who I have had the great prestige to meet, interview, and compose in writing.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS 2

This chapter exhibits the five remaining portraits of Malaysian Pastry chefs who partook in the World Pastry Cup. I begin with two of the most senior members from my sample of nine chefs (aliased as *the Symphonist* and *the Grandmaster*), followed by three of the youngest representatives of the national team (*the Protégés*). In particular, the creative experiences of the three youngest members were grouped together, as they share highly similar and interwoven creative experiences. I begin with the most recent participant of the World Pastry Cup in 2017, and also one of the more senior members of the nation – the Symphonist.

#### Portrait #5: Chef Lim Chin Kheng – “The Symphonist”

Chef Lim had a childhood filled with an affluence of gastronomical influences. At a young age, he was exposed to the colors and flavors of Malaysian delights attributed to his mother’s hawker business, allowing him to develop a strong and knowledgeable flavor profile. His culinary upbringings were what decisively made him leave a white-collar job to join the chef



profession. Over the course of his career, he has endured the environment of an autocratic kitchen, joined a pastry academy as a culinary instructor, and accomplished a sense of national pride in representing his country to the World Pastry Cup.

“The Symphonist” alias fits him perfectly, as he bears close semblance to a musician orchestrating complex flavor notes into harmonious symphonies. He is a chef that places the utmost emphasis on flavor delivery, and appreciates the human touch that goes into every step of creation process. Moreover, he is a historian who has an extensive understanding of the histories and works of his profession’s past predecessors. He has an immense appreciation on the thoughtfulness, notions, details, and meanings that were incorporated into historical desserts, which overall, empowers him with a sound knowledge on the sociological literature of desserts. He finds inspiration in hobbies away from the kitchen, immerses in pop culture, and sees room for experimentation in many existing recipes. His teammates address him as a “curious magician,” when they describe his inquisitiveness to flavor development and enhancement. Interestingly, he often turns to alcohol as his “poison of choice” when it comes to composing. In short, he is perhaps the most exciting persona to listen to when it comes to his descriptions of his dessert creations, as he breaks recipes down to the very substance in poetic fashion. One central theme emerged that best captures his view on creativity – creative harmony.

*Central theme: Creative harmony*

The Symphonist has a zealous view on the term “flavor.” He sees it as the embodiment of the rightful “spirit of chefs,” calling it “a chef’s ultimate weapon.” It resembles a treasured asset that one cannot obtain without years of studying, experimenting, and experience. To him, the mastery of flavor development and mixology allows a chef to grasp closeness to “culinary omnipotence,” allowing a chef to coin, dictate, influence, and disperse information for others to

follow. He states, “Flavor, is a chef’s ultimate weapon, without it, there would not be a chef profession to begin with.”

He breaks down the composition of flavor, which goes beyond the sensations of the palate, but includes a web of attributes encapsulating the entire consumption experience. He calls this network “harmony,” a term that was philosophically coined during our conversations, an unplanned revelation discovered and used constantly upon discovery. It is the ability to “imagine and create the elements on the mouthfeel” before the cooking process, bringing multiple considerations together in a “harmonious composition.” In particular, he considers temperature, moisture levels, viscosity, texture combinations, flavor combinations and aromas, all parceled within an overarching meaning given by the creator.

#### La Senteur: A musical composition

To further explicate his view on “creative harmony,” the Symphonist brings forth the story of *La Senteur*, a dessert near and dear to his heart, and ranked as one of the best desserts of 2017. French for ‘the scent,’ *La Senteur* is a remake of Pierre Hermé’s (a renowned French pâtisserie revolutionist) macaron flavor – *Ispahan*. The *Ispahan* was a two-decade old recipe coined based off the melodious chemistry between lychee, rose and raspberry flavors (see Hermé, 2011, pp. 71-72). It was a well-established and “flawless flavor” long before the Symphonist adopted it for the 2017 World Pastry Cup. Using *Ispahan* as an inspiration, the Symphonist embraced the risk of reanimating a flavor on the World Stage that is near and dear to the comforts of many traditionalists.

His exposure to the *Ispahan* began much earlier in his career, before his involvement in the World Pastry Cup. Back then, he had an obsessive admiration for Chef Pierre Hermé’s stature, which prompted him to compulsively replicate his idol’s recipes, especially the *Ispahan*. He

gained a sound understanding of the *Ispahan* through numerous replications. When tasked with the plated dessert responsibility for the World Pastry Cup in 2017, he was committed to reanimate his idol's creation. He began by first gaining a deeper appreciation to what makes the *Ispahan* flavor notes “flawless,” in which he deduced down to its fragrance, which encapsulates a harmonious “perfume” of lychees, roses and, raspberries. However, replicating it brings no justice to a creator; he had to bring it to new level.

He had a clear goal in mind, which was to produce something symphonically refreshing that perfumes the palate. More specifically, he wanted to pay tribute to the tradition, create something familiar, but through his own personal touch and composition. He began deconstructing the components into smaller puzzle pieces, and then reconstructing them intricately through different pastry elements. When finalized, his creation revealed a myriad of elements, which comprised of raspberry sorbet, almond biscuit sponge, lychee granita, lychee jelly, and rose parfait. Concluding the elements was not the end of the creative process. Inspired by those who took part in the World Pastry Cup before him, he understood that a storytelling element was required. Learning from his past predecessors, he set his mind on creating an emotional bridge that connects the flavors of *Ispahan* to the heart of his consumers. Through much devotion, dedication, experimentation, and constructive feedback, he narrowed down and fixated upon the idea of a “gift opening experience.”

Taking the figurative idea truthfully to heart, the Symphonist engineered a ‘*Present Box*’ made from a lychee-lime meringue to decorate and encase his modified rendition of the *Ispahan*. He flavored a simple meringue with lychee and lime, crafting it with an artistic streaked pattern, before shaping and dehydrating it into a holistic present box (See Figure 21). The entire process reflected much imagination, experimenting, and reflection between himself, his teammates, and the original *Ispahan*. In essence, he made sure that his ideas were filtered with constructive

criticism from professionals around him, while also ensuring that justice was done to the original work of his idol.

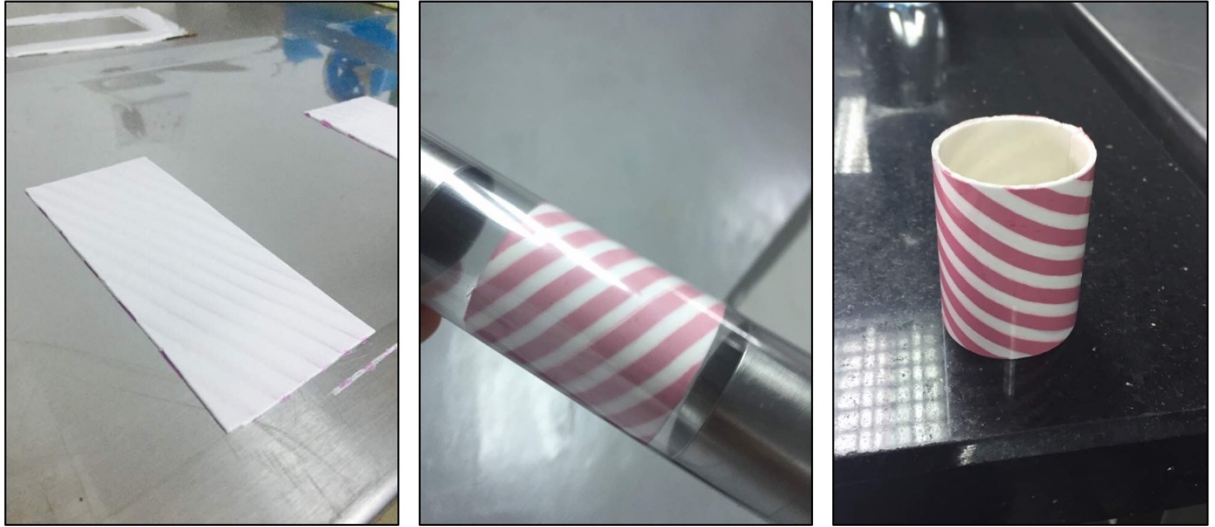


Figure 21 The crafting of the Present Box

Just like a musical composition, all melodies had an opening that triggers interests, and an eventual climax where the music reaches the highest point of tension, capturing maximum attention and excitement. This analogy best describes the Symphonist in his poetic construction of *La Senteur*. The *Present Box* was his opening, an encasing shell that invites attention for consumers to tear open, only to be introduced to the colorful layers of his rendition of the *Ispahan*. Figure 22 illustrates the final sketches and final product of *La Senteur*. As for the climax, he wanted to intensify the *Ispahan*'s distinct feature, the fragrance. He turned to alcohol to achieve this, which resembles a magical ingredient to the Symphonist that intensified the flavor notes in the most unique and diverse of ways. He analogizes cooking with alcohol to “playing for a surprise,” because of its effect on a constant recipe varies with every trial. He states, “you’d be surprised, every single time, alcohol is just a magical ingredient that does wonders. Every time I try it, a different flavor note erupts... It’s just full of surprises.”

Using lychee liquor as his “poison of choice” for the *La Senteur*, he achieved just what he dreamed of, which is to bring an idolized recipe to a new level through his own personal touch. Today, *La Senteur* serves as a hallmark for Malaysia’s pastry chefs, a benchmark for others to follow, as it was recognized as one of the best plated desserts to ever be presented at the World Pastry Cup.

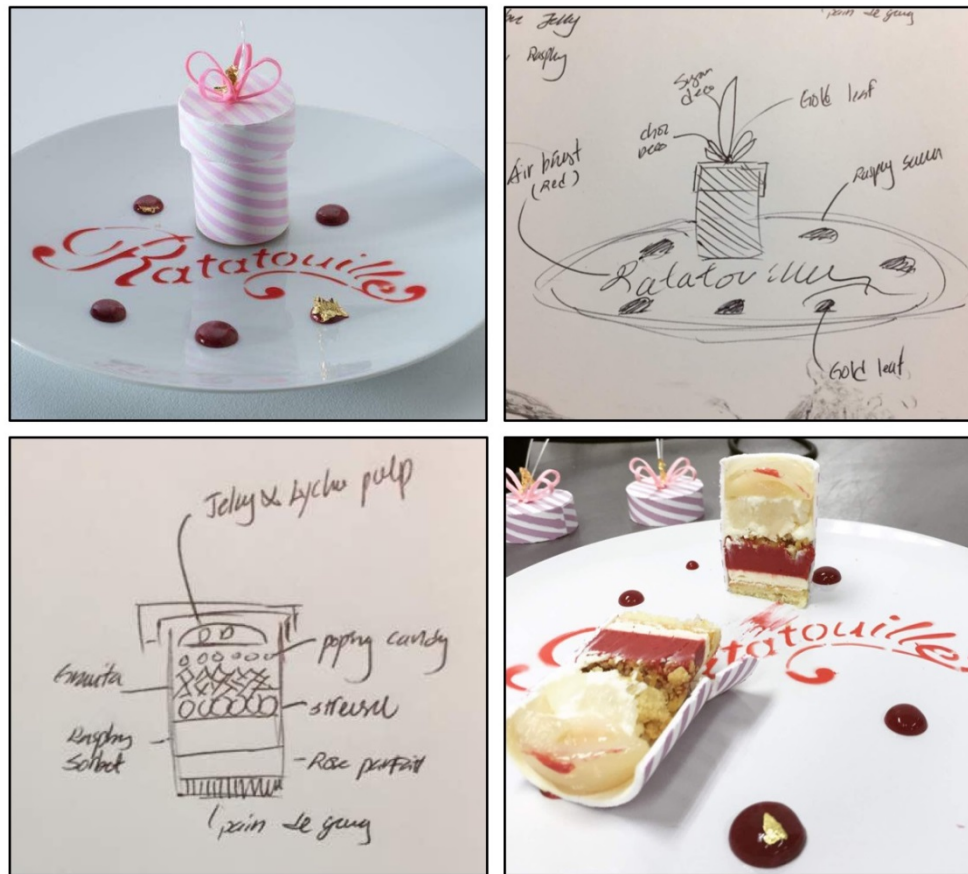


Figure 22 *La Senteur* (January 2017)

### *Summary of the Symphonist*

The Symphonist’s view of his creative capacity is simplistic, but true to the profession of a pastry chef. He is the embodiment of what makes a chef a chef, which is to develop harmonious flavors for the sake of tasteful pleasures. Like a composer, he ensures that every bundle of creation is

treated with immense care, resembling musical verses, and notes, hence ensuring that harmony is achieved in aesthetics, in perceived meaning, and most importantly in flavor. His colleagues adore and look up to his commitments to the profession's core. Like musical notes patched together to form a verse, the Symphonist enjoys blending various flavor components together in a playful and experimental manner to meet the abstractive musical notes playing in his head. Nevertheless, his creative process leans towards the construction of taste and sensations, with a clear objective of creating pleasure for those who consumes it. Notably, what stands out from his creative experience is his demeanor in understanding and indulging the works and literature of past creators. It is because of his appreciation of the past that allows him to transgress and deviate into new creative possibilities. His current creative endeavors rest on showcasing the various flavors native to Malaysia. He takes pride in exotic and tropical fruits grown in nourishing fashion within the lands and borders of his country.

#### Portrait #6: Chef Jess – “The Grandmaster”

Over his twenty-two-year career, Chef Jess was there since the very beginning, long before Malaysia's rise to recognition and stardom on the world stage. He battled frustrations, criticisms, and embarrassments throughout Malaysia's twelve years of participation in the biennial event. He stood by Malaysia's rookie years, which eventually fueled their remarkable growth in becoming one of the powerhouses of the World Pastry Cup. He is the most respected, senior, and longstanding chef of Malaysia's World Pastry Cup journey. ‘The Grandmaster’ alias honors his stature, as his successors symbolically call him, “the one above all,” who was part of a historic team that initiated Malaysia's journey to the World Pastry Cup and has collected a wondrous compilation of awards, medals and accolades across continents.

Retiring from the adrenaline and pressures of the competition, he now overlooks the Malaysia pastry team as a team manager responsible for the coordination of their creative journeys, while also serving on the judging panel of the World Pastry Cup. Taking a trip down memory lane, he remembered the difficult moments before Malaysia's rise to recognition. In particular, he explained a period of time where Malaysia has struggled to be taken seriously because of their "new world status," a status less favored and discriminated against when playing a game dominated by old world traditions.

Notably, the Grandmaster's portrait seemingly evades the phenomenon of culinary creativity straight on. His responses on the topic were implicitly verbose. Nonetheless, I proceeded with my inquiries naturalistically. A central theme did emerge, but it was in a rather deviant fashion, yet still enriching to the lived experience and lifeworld of chefs' creativity. In particular, his portrait provides an overarching perspective that unravels a different standpoint, providing a textured context to the circulation of creativity within the community of Malaysian pastry chefs. His narratives revolved around one central theme, where his views on creativity grounded towards a collective and communal social system. I label this theme as 'creative legacy.'

*Central theme: Creative legacy*

The Grandmaster speaks of creativity as a collective and communal system, where past wrongdoings, breakthroughs, and failures all leave a mark onto a historical archive. He witnessed how the competition itself has changed over the years, in which, what used to be a celebration of groundbreaking flavor combinations of desserts, became one that emphasizes on the artistic demeanor of the creator. "It has become a place to celebrate pastry as an art, and chefs as its creators" he comments. He praises that the stories and meanings behind each dessert have

progressed greater over recent occasions; however, their creations and dessert compositions have been “dumbed down to a simplistic formula,” where “almost everyone is following the same formula.” Regardless whether it is for an *entremet* or a plated dessert, a standard combination is expected in most creations. He states,

*Flavor wise, there haven't been much groundbreaking advancements. I have had the pleasure of tasting every team's creations during my time as a judge (For the World Cup)... Almost every product plays within the same formula. They all comprise of a sponge component, a crust, a cream, a jelly, and something icy like a sherbet. The only difference is that they are all packaged differently behind something symbolic. They may use different flavors, but the basic components to the formula are still there... It has become a place to celebrate pastry as an art and chefs as its creators.*

Despite contemplating that pastry arts on the world stage have been subjected to its formulas, he accredits that it is the mastery of craft and execution that plays the distinguishing role that separates one chef from another. The Grandmaster views creativity as a self-defined term, where each chef bounds it within his/her own reality. In spite of the parameters defined by the World Pastry Cup's rules and expectations, it is the self-provided meanings that ties each chef to his/her very own creation. In line with this, he brought up the story of his favorite showpiece, which made him exclusively happy not because of its quality of execution, but rather because it was the first of his own efforts. The design possessed no story or theme whatsoever. It was just him “having fun,” exploring, and putting things together. It was his very first showpiece, and perhaps one of the earliest few showpieces ever built in Malaysia during that period of time. He shared,

*It had no goal; fun doesn't need a goal... Looking back at it, of course it is not the best, you cannot compare with what the rest of the world is doing now... It was just random*



*pieces pieced together... I made a flower and I put it on the showpiece, I made a spider, then I put it next to the flower (laughs)... It was random; there was no need for a story, no need to worry about criticism. Because fun does not need to be judge,. I don't even have a name for it; it was just spiders, flowers and butterflies (see Figure 23).*

The showpiece was most memorable to the Grandmaster not because of its refined execution or great sophistication, but rather it was because the creative endeavor was driven by self-joy and satisfaction in its purest form. Creativity in this sense was “untainted” by the need for fame or fortune, instead it was for the satisfaction of the creative heart and self.



*Figure 23 Spiders, Flowers and Butterflies (October 2009)*

### A collective and cumulative system of creativity

Looking back at his rich history, he often revisits the memories of the competition environment as his initial entryway to success, resembling a setting where iron sharpens iron. As one of the forerunners of the pastry team's legacy, he has now taken the mantle of a mentor. He represents the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom to those who now stand by his wing. Serving as the team manager, the Grandmaster has on multiple occasions, cleaned up the messes left behind by those who participates, resolved conflicts, facilitated creative abrasions, witnessed disputes, and even defended his nation against embarrassment, failures, and disappointments. He analogizes his role as a manager to the likes of a woeful parent, watching teenagers get into trouble, only for him to put out the fires. Nevertheless, his disciples reckon him as a "selfless individual" who only wants to see young aspiring chefs achieve their dreams. He dedicates his career to hone the skillsets of new chefs, as well as to create new opportunities for them through establishing new professional networks and streams. His dream is to flourish a community of Malaysian pastry chefs with a self-drive to compete, to dig deep into their crafts, and to think forward for themselves and for the nation. His philosophical stance is one of nobility, aimed to ensure that the legacy of predecessors remains sturdy for future generations to adopt and follow.

He wholeheartedly believes that creativity is influenced and grounded by a social system, a social system that nourishes and encourages creative thinking based off prior knowledge and foundations. In brief, he believes that the legacy that he and other predecessors scripted have opened the doors for future generations to enter the gates to one of the most prestigious culinary events. In return, all he could hope for is that the generations to come continue to keep the established creative legacy alive in spirit, and to continuously disperse and circulate knowledge within the community of Malaysian pastry chefs.

### *Summary of the Grandmaster*

Retiring from competition participation, the Grandmaster now overlooks the Malaysia Pastry Team as a manager coordinating activities behind curtains, putting the unseen nuts and bolts together that makes Malaysia's journey seamless. He has seen the evolution of Malaysia's journey, starting from their embarrassing efforts, to their rise as a powerhouse in the *pâtisserie* domain. His take on creativity appears shallower than the other chefs in other portraits. He assesses that desserts on the world stage have subjected to its formulas, in which "nothing groundbreaking" has been seen over the recent decade, almost as if chefs' combined knowledge have reached their peak in flavor capacities. Nonetheless, he accredits the human touch, which depends on the mastery of executing *pâtisserie* craft flawlessly. Today, his role in the Malaysian Pastry community relies on the circulation of knowledge in a community of great minds and forward thinkers. He has passed down his legacy to those who are competing, in hopes that they would do the same in inspiring and passing down their knowledge to the future generations of Malaysia.

As evident, the Grandmaster's portrait on creativity is best reckoned as a deviant case. His responses to the phenomenon of creativity were implicit, yet still offer an overarching perspective of how creativity has evolved over the years. This portrait, in short, offers a rather different standpoint that provides a richer context to the circulation of creativity within the community of Malaysian pastry chefs. It provides a standpoint that creativity is grounded by a social system, a social system that nourishes and encourages creative thinking based off prior knowledge and foundations, all in which began and flourished upon a legacy of predecessors.

### Portrait #7-9: Chef Kean, Loi, & Lau – “The Protégés”

Handpicked from a rigorous trial selection and qualifying stages, Chef Kean, Chef Loi, and Chef Lau are the youngest additions to Malaysia’s pâtisserie roster. They are a dynamic trio, whom all started from humble beginnings, only to be spotted by those in the primes of the game. I label them as “the Protégés,” as they are currently by virtue, the disciples of the chefs painted before them in this study. The names ranging from the War General to the Grandmaster never evade their stories of creativity, as the descriptions of their creative experiences reflect close resemblance to the creative tapestry of their predecessors. I represent them as a whole, as they share interwoven creative experiences that draw connection to their mentors. I categorize this connection into one central theme, which encapsulates their creative experiences – *echoes of creativity*.

#### *Central theme: ‘Echoes’ of creativity*

The words of their mentors’ never seem evade the Protégés’ description of creativity, as they vividly accredit their creative journeys’ milestones to the advice and efforts of their mentors. Almost hauntingly, they “hear voices” in their heads when creating, which draws back many memories and images of their mentors. These voices and imageries resonate throughout the Protégés’ encounter with a creative task, resembling what I call ‘echoes’ of creativity. These ‘echoes’ unify the Protégés’ encounter with creativity to the learnings and lessons of their predecessors, which “haunts” and “blesses” them as they create. To elicit my conceptualization of ‘echoes,’ I present three individualized portraits of each protégé, each accompanied by creative experiences that echoes the voices of their mentors.

Portrait #7: Chef Kean – “The Engineer”

*I was clueless about what I wanted to do, Chef Horng held my hand through each trial run, he gave me a story of a hornbill to work with, and provided me with constructive feedback along the way. He made sure that I was always on point, always improving, and that I never go backwards. I owe him a lot for those moments.*

The excerpt above shows a rather sentimental statement about Chef Horng, a former member of the Malaysian Team whose soul currently rests in heaven. The story of the *Hornbill* was told in an indebted fashion, as it was fully accredited to his mentor’s guidance, alongside many others who supported him throughout the process. Chef Kean referred to himself as “the Engineer,” mainly because of his past occupation as a juvenile-electrician/engineer during his teenage years, in which he takes pride from.

Signing up for a competition, the Engineer possessed all the necessary craft required for the task in hand, but he lacked the storytelling skills that would help package his craft. Lacking in imagination, Chef Horng provided him with a jolt of inspiration compassionately. What vividly echoes in the Engineer’s mind upon revisiting the *Hornbill* was Chef Horng’s dedication in “holding his hand” throughout the process, watching his every move like a parent overseeing a child riding a bicycle. Looking back, he has nothing but sheer gratitude and appreciation for his late mentor. The images of the *Hornbill* offer a connection for him to his late mentor and friend, binding him in cherished memories. Figure 24 showcases the various trials of the *Hornbill* and its finalized version on stage, all in which echoes the voices of Chef Horng.



Figure 24 *The Hornbill* (September 2013) From left to right, the first model, trials of the finalized model, the Finalized Hornbill

The creative habits of other predecessors also echo in the Engineer’s creative experience. In his journey of qualifying for the World Pasty Cup in 2016, the Engineer reflected many traits and habits of “the leader of the pack,” the War General. The War General has left a hefty hallmark for the Protégés to follow, most notably in their approach to showpiece designs. In the Engineer’s case, he dived into the world of fictional characters and fantasy, and attempted to recreate the iconic character of *Davy Jones* from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie franchise. He embarked on a movie marathon, pinpointing artifacts and symbols that from the fictional world to express onto in his showpiece. Putting the pieces together, he produced a sketch of his design, and enlarged it to life-size sketch similar to the War General’s “mirror.” He explains that the “mirror” was important, which helps him to accurately portray *Davy Jones* without hiccups. He was explicit in accrediting that he picked up this trait from the War General, which usefully allows him to visualize “the symmetry” and “the artistic movement and flow” of the showpiece. Apart from the appeal, enlarging his sketch was also vital in helping the Engineer conceptualize



the sturdiness of the showpiece before actualizing. In particular it helps him identify the weak points and joints, making it a safety precaution. Figure 25 shows *Davy Jones* alongside his life-size sketch.



Figure 25 *Davy Jones* (October 2015)

The echoes of the War General's voices in designing showpieces clearly left a resounding mark on the Engineer. But what resonates even fiercer is the constant reminder that he is still, at the very core, a chef. Despite taking much pride and joy in designing and playing with showpieces, the Engineer is constantly reminded that he must never be caught up in the limelight of a showpiece artist, but rather focus on his craftsmanship in *pâtisserie* and flavor. Such echoes haunt him day-to-day, instilling values that would otherwise be forgotten. The Engineer is

grateful that he was not in the trenches of falling too deep down the rabbit hole of the showpiece obsession and delusion. He sees the echoes of the War General as a crucial reverberating warning, forcing him to rethink his fetish for showpieces.

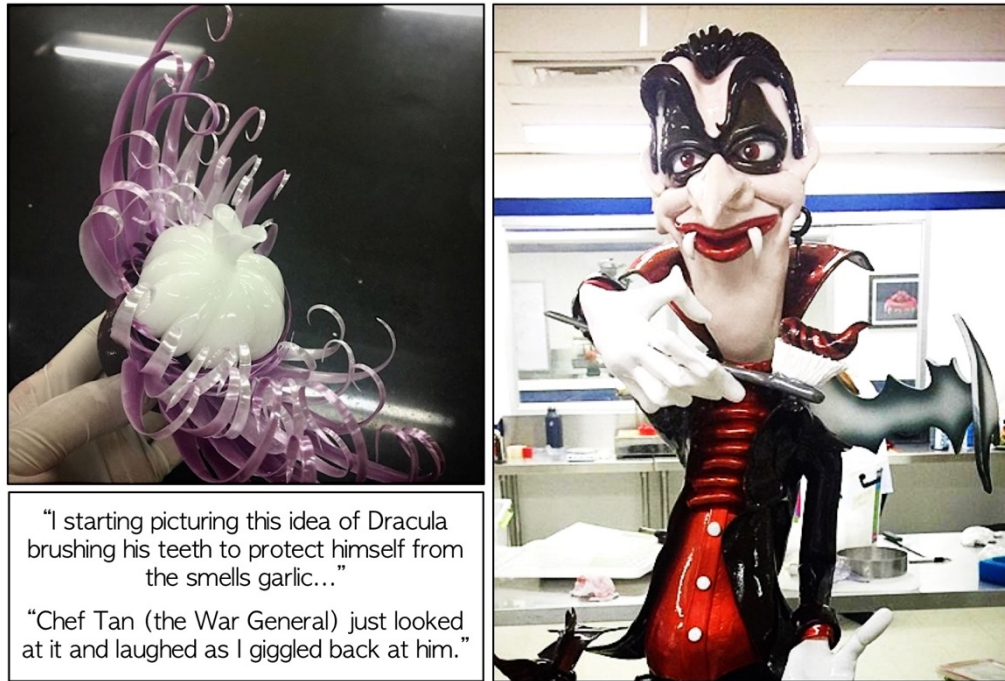
To summarize, he addresses that if he were to fall too deep down the rabbit hole, he would then be no more than a “make-up artist for pastry.” Today, he describes the echoes of his mentor’s words and wisdom continuously reappears during his work in the kitchen, which eerily reminds him that being a pastry chef is never just about the aesthetics nor the showpieces, but for the nourishment of the consumer. From Chef Horng to the War General, the legacy left by those before him echoes throughout his creative endeavors. Without them, his success in standing on stage with some of the world’s finest craftsman and creators would most probably be only one of fantasy.

#### Portrait #8: Chef Loi – “The Comedian”

Much like the Engineer, Chef Loi has a strong passion for showpiece creations, which are often packaged with humoristic touch. Commented by the Mad Scientist himself, Chef Loi is the “most creative of them all, with a great sense of humor in his art.” Such a statement, coming from one of the world’s best pastry chefs is hard live up to. I alias him as “the Comedian,” as his showpiece reeks of an artistic touch in a comical manner, such as his take on ‘*Dracula Loves Garlic*.’ He describes,

*I came across an idea of vampires and garlic. We all know vampires are afraid of the sight and scent of garlic... So why not create a defense mechanism for it? I starting picturing this idea of Dracula brushing his teeth to protect himself from the smells garlic... I enjoyed telling this story... Chef Tan (the War General) just looked at it and laughed as I giggled back at him. (See Figure 26).*





*Figure 26 Dracula Loves Garlic (October 2017)*

The Comedian enjoys portraying showpieces in a playful and laughable manner, which often brings smiles to others' faces upon sight. Humbly, he remains very loyal to his predecessors' comments and teachings. He accredits the "freedom" provided by his predecessors, in which he shares,

*They always give me the freedom to do what I want and what is meaningful to me... They have so much knowledge from experiences. They worked hard for it, and all I can say is that I am grateful that they are passing down some of their essences of it to me... They are always very respectful, they never dictate how I should do my art, they would just ask me to process and digest their comments, and let roam freely to animate tales that are meaningful to me.*

He calls this a "respectful approach" in helping him find his creative self. He appreciates the treatment as a peer rather than an apprentice. He notes that they are not there "dictate" his

movements but guide in a considerate way. Nonetheless, he is often left with a pool of comments and suggestions to work on. Each comment echoes radiantly in his head, as he describes that it is an “overwhelming phase of processing,” as some comments may contradict one another, which adds much confusion when attempting to address them. But it is through this “respectful approach” where he is still in the driver’s seat, dictating his course of direction. In essence, he analogizes himself to a “jigsaw puzzle” pieced and amalgamated by fragments of his inspirational figures. Each piece of puzzle echoes a creative trait and character of his predecessors in which he proudly embeds.

Much like the Engineer, the Comedian has received a fair share of warnings of being overly obsessed with showpiece designs. He has embraced these “echoes of warnings,” and has devoted much effort in mastering his craft and refining the sensory abilities of taste and flavor. However, showpieces represent great evocative and meaningful values for the Comedian, because it offers him a place to play, a task to look forward to that embraces the personification of an artists. He analogizes showpieces to a “home,” resembling a sanctuary for him to return to. He expresses,

*I will always return to it... It's like after a long day at work, or a long spree of travel, I would then return home. It's like a reunion with your family. Whenever I open the front doors of home, I feel welcomed... It just feels great to be home.*

A more resounding echo is the habit of keeping a sketchbook as a form of creative journal. He carries it wherever he goes. Just like his car keys, wallet, and cellphone, his sketchbook alongside a sharpener, pencil and eraser resemble a packaged set of items that he “never leaves home without.” Its pages consist of a list past creations and also concepts that have yet to be created. It now resembles a space for him to review his past works, his past ideas, his past results all to be reevaluated and helping him find his next step in the creative journey. His

habits of documentation not only revolve around showpieces but are also evident in his desserts. Unlike the visually dominant sketches for his showpieces, he would often find scrap papers to scribble and record down ideas and flavor notes, only to be formally documented later. During this “creative stage,” he would be able to imaginarily taste his ideas on the palate, as he matches flavors in his head and quickly recording it down before he loses it. “It’s almost like I can taste it before I even produce it,” he expresses. Jokingly, he states that his jottings for desserts are often written in “horrid fashion,” looking like unreadable scribbles and doodles that even he, as the author, would fail to recognize (See Figure 27).

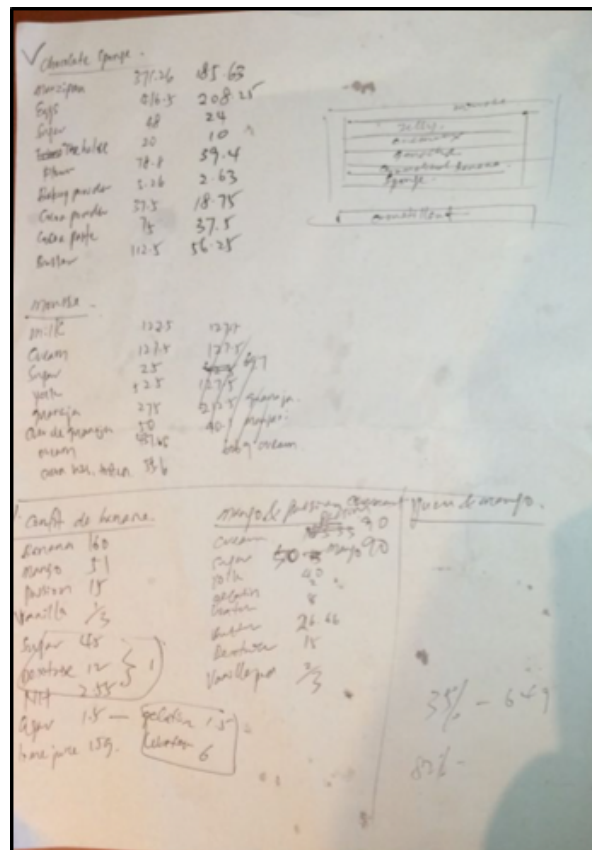


Figure 27 The Comedian’s documentation process of desserts

Portrait #9: Chef Lau – “The Quiet Princess”

“She has an angelic touch on everything, she reminds me a lot of Breadpitt,” says the War General when commenting on Chef Lau. She is the youngest addition to the national team, who has already gained much respect from those before her. She holds herself with much reserve and is shy to every mention of her creative endeavors. Given her lack of expressiveness, I rely much on the descriptions from the other chefs in my study to paint her portrait. Many of which claims her to be “a princess” with an “angelic touch.” “She puts a touch of elegance on everything,” claims the Mad Scientist, “she can take something simple and make it absolutely extravagant.” I alias her as “the Quiet Princess,” which soothingly suits her angelic and elegant demeanor as a humble creator. She admits to idolize her predecessors, saying that they are huge inspirations and are “big shoes to fill in the future.” With that being said, she draws many inferences and encouragements from her “idols,” claiming that their creations are often echoed in her own work. She asserts to only be “following their footsteps.” Conversely, her idols suggest otherwise, declaring that she possesses these “angelic” and “elegant” touches naturally. With much emphasis, the Mad Scientist had this to say,

*You cannot teach these touches, she has them instinctively and naturally... She adds a lot of subtle touches that brands her desserts as her own. If you arrange her desserts alongside others, you can most definitely tell which is hers. It's often the most elegant-looking one. (See Figure 26)*



*Figure 28 'Angelic and elegant touches,' three pictures on the left: assorted petite fours, right: The Watchmaker (January 2018)*

Despite the strong excerpts from those of her predecessors, she remains highly humble when describing her desserts and perspectives on creativity. She prefers to express less than others, as her descriptions were highly subtle. Nonetheless, her traces of creativity suggest otherwise, as she evidently carries forward many habits that echo her idols and predecessors. Much alike the Comedian, the Quiet Princess has the “freedom” to process comments and suggestions, but is never mandated to follow them if they contradict with her beliefs. She tends to take them more to heart, however. Being an admirer of her predecessors, she could only “follow” and listen to her idols’ comments and suggestions. She sees it as a privilege at her young age and standing as a junior member. Despite her idols encouraging her to constantly “be herself,” and “to do as she likes,” she seems to be called by an echo into the shadows of her predecessors. “She holds great potential though,” says the Mad Scientist. Being the only female member of the Malaysian team since the 2011, her predecessors all strongly stand by their words in believing

that Chef Lau possesses a creative soul that has yet to be fully awaken. But for now, she remains in the echoing shadows of her seniors.

### *Summary of the Protégés*

Being the three youngest of my study participants, the Protégés notably have less to share compared to those of greater seniority, perhaps because they are only in their beginning stage of their career. Despite having all bearing the flags of their countries, they speak more of the names of their mentors than themselves. A shadow seems to loom over them, as they continue to find their own identity. This shadow reflects to what I call ‘echoes,’ which resembles a reverberating legacy of habits, knowledge and patterns that resonates throughout the Protégés’ encounter with culinary creativity. These echoes can come in forms of habits or methods (e.g., documentation through sketchbooks) or even as a reminder of their past lessons and learnings guiding them down a path that would unleash their greater potentials. In a way, these echoes act as a ‘compass,’ pointing them at the right direction, ensuring that they never fall off course. This is particularly important for the youthful Protégés, as they risk falling down a rabbit hole of showpiece obsession and delusion. Hence, the echoes of their seniors constantly remind them that they are still responsible for creating nourishments for guests, and that taste and flavor development must never be compromised for the limelight of showpieces.

All in all, the Protégés offer a series of nuances separate from the other portraits. They remain in an embryonic stage of their creative careers, which requires greater guidance, yet, at the same time, freedom. The individual portraits of the Engineer, the Comedian, the Quiet Princess all show glimmers of such freedom being administered by the seniors, only offering suggestions and comments, but never dictating them to follow as instructed. The echoes, although haunting and overshadowing, still resonate as a guide, as they still possess the autonomy of choice to

follow, alter and deflect. As the Protégés progress through the stages of their career, and as the echoes of those before them starts to fade, the protégés will soon step from behind the shadows of their predecessors; while not forgetting them, they will solidify their own styles and approaches. In short, they represent an exciting trio, filled with youth and energy. But for now, they remain as an absorbent platform that functions within the ringing echoes of their mentors.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter offers a diverse view on creativity, starting the core of a chef – flavor – in which was described as “a chef’s ultimate weapon,” to the echoes of creativity channeled through a community of accessible knowledge and wisdom. To begin with, the concept of “creative harmony” was brought forth, used to describe the composition of flavor. In particular, flavor goes beyond the sensations of the palate, and includes a network of attributes encapsulating the entire consumption experience that includes considers temperature, moisture levels, viscosity, texture combinations, flavor combinations and aromas, all parceled within an overarching meaning given by the creator. In short, a chefs’ creativity in dessert creation resembles much likeliness to a composer bringing multiple musical verses and notes together in a “harmonious composition,” that considers aesthetics, perceived meaning, and most importantly flavor.

On the other hand, the Grandmaster’s portrait on creativity offers a perspective on the circulation of creativity within a collective community. This perspective suggests that creativity is grounded by a social system, a social system that nourishes and encourages creative thinking based off prior knowledge and foundations, all in which began and flourished upon a legacy of predecessors. This overlaps with the Symphonist’s appreciation for past creators’ works and literature. In which was described that only through an appreciation of the past, would creators knowledgeably transgress to create new possibilities. Still in line with the Grandmaster’s social

system of creativity, the Protégés' portrait offered the concept of 'echoes,' which resembles a reverberating legacy of habits, knowledge and patterns of their mentors that resonates throughout creative experience. These echoes offer a guide for the younger creators who are still in the embryonic stage of their creative careers. In a way, the Protégés' view reality with a pair of lenses that have been foundationally constructed for them by their mentors. It offers them a template to follow, until they mature to an extent where their creative capacities override those of their predecessors, hence numbing down the volume of the echoes. In short, this implies that the phenomenology of creativity is cultivated not only by individuals but collectively as a community that continuously disperses, circulates and echoes knowledge within the social group of culinary creators.

As this section ends an extensive portrayal of culinary creativity across nine unique portraits, a summary of each chefs' creative capacity, creative processes and approaches, as well as resonant stories are illustrated in Table 1.



Table 1 Summary of Portraits

Portrait	Aliases	Creative Capacity	Creative Processes	Resonant Stories
1	War General	Excessive planner; Strategist; Chemist; Storyteller.	Fueled by competition adrenaline; Driven by obsession; Research; Reanimates the animated; Embraces fictional literature; Sketchbooks; Enlarges sketches to resemble mirrors.	2013 Devastation; <i>Steampunk Cinderella</i> ; <i>The Drizzle</i> .
2	Jester	Playful; Spaces out; Shameless.	Embraces failure; Takes creative initiatives; Sketchbooks; Yearns for imagination.	2013 Devastation; <i>Pandora's Box</i> ; <i>The Marble Story</i> .
3	Mad Scientist	Unorthodox; Novelty chaser; Storyteller; Playful.	To never repeat; Freestyle expression (no sketches); Sketchbooks; To bring a story to guests; Embraces fictional literature.	<i>Dark and Evil Showpieces</i> ; <i>The Goblin</i> ; <i>Anything can be a mold</i> ; <i>Illumination</i> .
4	Survivor	Playful; Modest; Against traditions.	Synthesizes of faraway ideas; Creates based off experiences; Research; Consult books; Sketch for the sake documenting; Challenges traditions.	<i>Scars of the industry</i> ; <i>Book of creative healing</i> ; <i>Screw traditions</i> .
5	Symphonist	Simplistic; Flavor driven.	Theatricalize desserts; Experiments; Research; Sketches desserts; Embraces native ingredients; Embraces the unpredictability of alcohol.	<i>La Senteur</i> .
6	Grandmaster	Deviant case; Experienced; Strategist; Noble; Leader.	Creative journal; Accessibility of knowledge derived from creative legacy.	<i>Legacy initiator</i> ; 2013 Devastation; <i>Spiders, Flowers and Butterflies</i> .
7	Engineer	Indebted to mentors.	Embraces advice from predecessors; Reanimates the animated; Sketchbooks; Enlarges sketches to resemble mirrors.	<i>The Hornbill</i> ; <i>Davy Jones</i> .
8	Comedian	Indebted to mentors; Humoristic.	Embraces advice from predecessors; Reanimates the animated; Embraces humor; Sketchbooks.	<i>Dracula Loves Garlic</i> .
9	Quiet Princess	Unassertive; Indebted to mentors.	Embraces advice from predecessors; Adds a touch of elegance.	<i>Angelic and elegant touches</i> .

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

Over the past two chapters, I have described using portraiture, the essences of nine chefs' personal experience with culinary creativity. In this chapter, I discuss the many similarities and nuances across portraits, bringing them together into one holistic portrayal. Specifically, this chapter serves two purposes. The first is to pull together the various clustered materials from the previous two chapters and portray them into major themes that encapsulate the essences of culinary creativity. And second, to offer discussion points for each theme by drawing theories and comparing findings from previous relevant works. Much like the previous two chapters, I maintain the voice as a portraitist in synthesizing the various essences of culinary creativity through my 'voice,' while staying as close as possible to the descriptions, examples, and analogies as expressed by my chefs in their encounter with creativity.

All things considered, this chapter discusses four themes that portray a holistic portrait of culinary creativity as experienced by Malaysian pastry chefs. These four themes include (1) *creative harmony*, (2) *the poetics of creative space*, (3) *the duality of creative identity*, and lastly (4) *imaginative episodes*.

## Creative Harmony

The first theme mainly reflects upon two key creations/innovations of pastry chefs' creative processes – desserts and showpieces. These creations/innovations are the outcomes of their creative process (Amabile, 1996), providing their initial ideas and inspirations a means to an end. In other words, it is in both desserts and showpieces that carry strong resonant meanings in their lifeworld, offering chefs a goal that fuels their creative endeavors. Capturing both creations is the overarching concept of 'creative harmony,' which in essence, resembles the ability to not only compose creations that satisfies sensory qualities, but also includes emotional and storytelling attributes that makes up the entire consumption experience. In this theme, I discuss the concept of creative harmony in both desserts and showpieces individually, as they are two separate creations that undergo different creative passageways.

*Desserts – “Flavor, a chef’s ultimate weapon”*

*The renewed cultural interest in the culinary reveals a world that cannot be accurately communicated through images but through craft that triggers experiences and emotions.*

*Pastries can be thought of as a very cinematic food. Constructed as entertaining, they are little spectacles meant to finish off a meal, or offer a pleasant break during the day.*

Caracostea (cited in Hermé, 2015, p. 34)

By definition, a pastry chef is a creator who specializes in desserts or pâtisserie. To the pastry chefs extraordinaire, 'flavor' was reflected as the core principle of dessert creations, representing and embodying the “rightful spirit of chefs,” which was best analogized as “a chef’s ultimate weapon.” However, creative harmony goes beyond the development of flavor, but includes a network of attributes encapsulating the entire consumption experience. This “network”

as coined by the Symphonist (Portrait #5), considers multiple attributes that includes, but are not limited to, temperature, moisture levels, viscosity, texture combinations, flavor combinations and aromas; all parceled within an overarching meaning (e.g., emotional or story element) given by the creator. It is the ability to meet a balance point between these multilevel complexities that results into a “harmonious composition,” which separates extraordinary chefs from the ordinary.

This harmonious composition has been analogized to reflect a screenplay production by the Jester in his rendition of *Pandora’s Box* (See Portrait #2). He recognizes that on each plate there is a “main actor,” and those surrounding the main actor should “support and enhance” without stealing the limelight from the “star of the dish.” The concept of creative harmony permeates this analogy, suggesting that the voices of the supporting characters are a carefully controlled one that never overshadows those of the main actors, because a battle for the limelight would jeopardize a coherent harmony. Nonetheless, some flavor compositions may instead reflect a duet or a symphony, as some flavor notes once paired and combined are destined for synergies, which Page (2017) terms as ‘flavor affinities.’ Hence, it is within a chef’s artistic capacity to pair, blend, and synthesize flavors in a harmonious fashion using different pastry elements and reinterpretations.

One vivid example of such ‘duets and symphonies,’ would be the Symphonist’s harmonious composition of *La Senteur*, which resembles a reanimated version of the *Ispahan* (See Portrait #5). Discovered over two decades ago by French pâtisserie revolutionist Pierre Hermé, the *Ispahan* was a flavor affinity that was considered “flawless,” comprising of lychees, roses, and raspberries. Altering the *Ispahan* risks the harmony of its well-established composition, but replicating it too brings no justice to the creator. Despite this paradoxical dispute, the Symphonist remastered the *Ispahan* through his own personal touch by deconstructing the various elements and reinterpreting each component in intricate fashion. In addition, he provided a theatrical element to his rendition of the *Ispahan* by crafting a *Present*

*Box* out of meringue to provide consumers a “gift-opening experience.” The end result was not only a dessert that reflects creative harmony, but also a hallmark of perfection, as the *La Senteur* was recognized as one of the best plated desserts to ever be presented at the World Pastry Cup.

The portrayal of ‘harmony’ resonates much reference to Stierand and Dörfler’s (2012) phenomenological study on Michelin Star chefs’ culinary creativity. Chefs in that particular study described harmony in a variety of analogous ways that often referenced the arts, especially music and beauty. Specifically, the concept of proportion emerged as an important feature of harmony in Stierand and Dörfler’s (2012) study, which suggests that there is a “golden ratio” in the composition of culinary innovations, bearing much semblance to music composers “setting the climax” for a music composition (p. 953). This analogy reverberatingly aligns with the poetic construction of *La Senteur*’s composition in many ways. Just like a musical composition, melodies have an opening that triggers interests, followed by an eventual climax where the music reaches the highest point of tension, which captures maximum attention and excitement. The *Present Box* of *La Senteur* was his opening, which resembled an encasing shell that invites attention for consumers to tear open, only to be introduced to the colorful layers of his rendition of the *Ispahan*. As for the climax, consumers were intimately introduced to *La Senteur*’s distinct feature, the fragrance, in which the Symphonist intensified substantially using lychee liquor (see Portrait #5, Figure 21 & 22). Drawing much reference to the arts, Stierand and Dörfler provided a brief idiographic foundation for the concept of creative harmony. However, it is through ‘portraiture’ that this study added richer descriptions by explicating the textural and structural essences as described by the creators themselves (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This was evident in this study’s pastry chefs’ inherent desire to “bring a story to a guest,” hence depicting an innate yearning to narrate and engage in storytelling. This notion, although faintly discussed here, is illuminated in full light in the later sections of this chapter.

In essence, creative harmony within the realms of desserts emulates much semblance to sensorial poetry, which draws much references to the creation of music, films and other arts. It denotes a balanced composition of essential flavors and sensorial attributes, gift-wrapped and cinematically theatricalize with an artistic touch. It is the recognition and appreciation of this ability in balancing the various points of complexity that constitutes to a “harmonious composition,” thus separating the pastry chefs extraordinaire from those of the ordinary.

### *Showpieces – “Fulfilling the sense of emptiness”*

The making of showpieces is a common thread that all pastry chefs in this study shared. Showpieces are best described as ornamental decorative centerpieces made from food ingredients during grand competitions or for a display counter. They can come in many forms, such as wedding cakes, bread sculptures, or even butter sculptures. But for a pastry chef who competes, it often comes in two forms – sugar and chocolate.

The functionality of showpieces draws much controversy. Adams (2011) in particular, contemplates that showpieces are excessively lavish items that reflect chefs’ creative narcissism, as they are “...gaudy, inedible statues [that] are the epitome of decadence, the perfect adornment to a table that is all about lavish excess...” (p. 72). However, it is a meaningful and intimate output that resembles a “home” and “sanctuary” that ties this study’s chefs closely to the personification of an artist. It is through showpieces that each chef finds freedom to self-express, as they serve as “platforms” that connect chefs intimately to their creations. For instance, the War General reflects that showpieces are “playgrounds” where the role of “imagination takes over.” It is in its very essence, a fun endeavor driven by pure obsession of shapes, colors, and patterns of everyday objects. This ultimately, allows a chef to externalize something “inside” that “wants to come out,” thus indicating that the constructing of showpieces could fulfil an internal emptiness

felt within an artist. This emptiness aligns with Reinder's (1992) conceptualization of a perceived sense of lack, which forces one to commit to produce an artwork in order to fulfil it. On the other hand, Nelson and Rawlings (2007) argue that this "sense of lack" is an embedded commitment and routine of an artist, functioning as a trigger that allows artists to continuously seek and create. Interestingly, this sense of lack was not explicitly found present in dessert creations across portraits, but only in showpieces. This could be explained by the artistic nature of the showpiece creation process, as they are one-dimensional objects of creation that bear much semblance to artworks of sculptors, painters and other craftsmen. It is because of the one-dimensionality in which chefs could freely integrate narratives into its composition, hence allowing them to externalize their ideas on a platform.

Despite being a self-expressive endeavor, the need to harmonize the many components into a holistic and artistic portrayal was a common reference point by each chef across portraits. They are not only specialty creations that are near and dear to my sample of chefs, but also a self-fulfilling work of art that has a means to itself, satisfying a chef's sense of emptiness within. The process of this poignant creation considers not only a chef's mastery of craft, but also the presentation of artistic movement and color composition of the showpiece. For instance, the Engineer asserted creative harmony to "the symmetry" as well as "the artistic movement" of his masterpieces (See Portrait #7), whilst the Survivor accredits the combination of the shine, transparency, and vibrant colors "attached onto a core with a curvy/flowy movement" (See Portrait #4). Reflecting on previous literature, the concept of proportion from past works resonates once again, which proposes the need for a balanced ratio between the individual parts and the whole (Naini, Moss, & Gill, 2006). Also known as the "golden ratio" (Stierand & Dörfler, 2012, p. 953), this concept is, however, extended by the storytelling element guiding the artistic portrayal of the showpiece. This was noted across portraits, as each chef soundly mentioned their rhetoric as a storyteller, which helps create an emotional bond and conversation between the

creator and the spectator. Ranging from the War General's *Steampunk Cinderella* (Portrait #1) to the Mad Scientist's "dark and fearful" showpieces (Portrait #3), the storytelling skillset is reckoned as an essential demeanor for chefs at this level that not only fulfils one's sense of lack, but also help heightens a pastry chef to "another level." It is through this need to bring a narrative to life that makes pastry chefs connect to the artistic personification with greater intimacy.

In essence, the epitome of being a storyteller interweaves into the creative conceptualization of showpieces. This epitome guides pastry chefs' craft to animate, construct, and harmonize meaningful compositions that ultimately self-fulfils one's creative void, whilst also communicating an expressive message to those who sets eyes on them. This complex engagement goes beyond the norms of dessert making, and digs deeper into the ruminative wonders of two simplistic ingredients of limitless possibilities – sugar and chocolate. It is within the lifeworlds of Malaysian World Pastry Cup contenders that this artistic spirit is tapped into, allowing them to communicate with their inner soul as a creator, and externalizing it onto monumental showpieces. As contemplated before, these monumental works of art reflect a chef's creative standing, separating them from ordinary cooks (Woloson, 2002). It is within these rationales where pastry chefs find meaning in their world of work. In short, despite showpieces notorious reputation for being a platform to display one's creative narcissism, it resonates as a "home and sanctuary" for one's creative self to reconnect with one's artistic personification. And it is this reunification with the artistic self, where extraordinary pastry chefs find refuge to recharge and refuel their innate desire to create.

#### *Summary of creative harmony*

This theme noted that culinary innovations in the lifeworld of pastry chefs come in two distinct forms – desserts and showpieces. For desserts, harmony focuses on the delivery of flavor,



which resembles the “rightful spirit of chefs,” and “a chef’s ultimate weapon.” The creative process of showpieces on the other hand, reflects a self-fulfilling artistic endeavor that has a means to itself, satisfying a chef’s sense of emptiness within. Both creations are also packaged by an overarching meaning (e.g., emotional or story element) provided by the creator. While the dessert ties pastry chefs to the essence of their profession through the creation activity of sensorial nourishments; showpieces on the other hand, connect chefs to the artistic personification in the most intimate of ways, by allowing chefs to externalize something “inside” that “wants to come out,” thus fulfilling the sense of emptiness within.

In brief, drawing much reference to the arts, Stierand and Dörfler provided an idiographic foundation for the concept of creative harmony. Using portraiture, this study added rich descriptions by explicating the textural and structural essences as described by the creators themselves. As portraiture considers the authentic meaning and resonance of each creator without ignoring scientific rigor, this study hence offers a different “angle of vision” on the dimensions of culinary innovation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). To this end, this study alongside Stierand and Dörfler’s are two of the very few studies that delineate culinary creations from the eyes and the soul of a chef; whereas others misguidedly compare culinary creations to the likes of a commercialized product development process, ignoring the personal narratives and considerations of the creator (e.g., Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007, 2008, 2009). In summary, pastry chefs who compete in the World Pastry Cup are not limited to the simplistic view as the preparer of desserts. Instead, they take on modernist impressionism in their world of work, as they aspire to portray artistic styles that break the rules of conventional *pâtisserie* (Boyle & Moriarty, 1997). And, it is in creating both desserts and showpieces that chefs embark on a meaningful journey with an endgame to their creative adventures.

## The Poetics of Creative Space

Malaysian pastry chefs engage in culinary creativity poetically in many spaces and places. Influenced by the lyrical works of Bachelard (1994) on the spatial experiences of the domestic home, these spaces answer the question, “where does creativity happen in pastry chefs’ daily lives?” I present in this theme, the essences of how pastry chefs create meaning in different spaces, as well as how these spaces fertilize their creative capacity to imagine, fantasize and create. These spaces can be imaginary, self-constructed, genuine or even personal. In totality, there are five main spaces in which creativity resonates for chefs in this study: (1) opportunity/stimuli-rich spaces, (2) fictional spaces/imagination, (3) sketchbooks, (4) personal library, and lastly (5) the kitchen. Drawing on experiences as evidence for each portrait, I discuss each space and how it resonates in each chef’s creative encounter. At the end of this section, I provide my discussion, which summarizes both overlapping and contrasting points from existing literature.

### *Opportunity/Stimuli-rich spaces – “Space to showcase on a grand scale”*

Opportunity/stimuli-rich spaces are actual existing spaces that allow pastry chefs to be in contact with his/her creative spirit, facilitating them to diverge and wander into various imaginative possibilities. Such spaces offer a special context without the pressures of the kitchen, where they can shift to a deliberative cognitive mode conducive to playing with ideas. One of the many spaces that chefs find filled with opportunities are in display counters, which the War General suggests that it reflects the “first impression of the pastry kitchen.” It is an intersecting space that separates the back scene (i.e., the kitchen) from the front scene (i.e., the consumer/service area), representing a crossing point where finished creations are presented on a stage for consumers. It is also a space where the artist’s personification takes over, where chefs

allow intuition and inner senses to dictate the placement and arrangement of desserts alongside showpieces. In a way, these counters show resemblance to an empty canvas filled with a myriad of opportunities, allowing chefs to put the “place of chaos” behind them, and dive into a realm where the artist synthesizes pieces together on a “grand scale” (See Portrait #1).

Apart from display counters, competitions also form a symbolic stage for the chefs to elicit creativity in the most desirable way. Particularly, the competition’s enforced deadline poses a challenge and typically an adrenaline rush. Thus, the symbolic parameters of the pastry competitions made the pastry chefs “driven,” endlessly engaging in “searching,” “playing,” “manipulating,” “twisting,” “sourcing,” and ultimately “creating.” All of which would never happen without the deadlines imposed by the competition’s symbolic parameters.

In line with this, the engagement with showpieces epistemically frames how pastry chefs view reality in different spaces. It is their constant pursuit for artistic endeavors through showpieces that conditions them to see shapes, colors, and artistic patterns in everyday objects. These stimuli provoke chefs to visualize converging uses for such patterns, tempting to adopt and transfigure such stimuli into edible adaptations. The experience of the Jester best describes this during one particular encounter in a shopping mall, in which he claimed to have “travelled to a different dimension” upon setting eyes onto a marble backdrop while window shopping (See Portrait #2). What proceeded after was him bringing the idea to the kitchen for experimentation and play, where he created marbled-pieces of chocolates (See Figure 12). All in all, this suggests that such stimuli-rich spaces offer a myriad of possibilities to trigger new thoughts and ideas inside the mind of a chef. For the Jester in particular, his encounter within such spaces caused him to detach oneself from reality, and endingly bringing him across dimensions into one an unknown world. This brings us to the next space of creativity – fictional spaces.

*Fictional spaces – “Spacing out into the unknown”*

Fictional spaces are spaces existing in the imaginations of those who created them. It offers a space of refuge outside of reality, a place with no boundaries where one's limit is only restricted by his/her resourcefulness in imagination. Fictional spaces can be of the imaginations of the chef as the creator, or also the imaginations of others. *The Marble Story* as experienced by the Jester best elicits the former, as he described to have “spaced out” and have entered an alternate reality in which he labels as “interdimensional travels,” “leaving his surrogate body behind” in the real world. In this alternate reality, he is equipped with an “imaginary pencil and sketchbook,” and would begin sketching his designs and ideas in his mind. He continued to describe that exiting such travels bears much semblance to “waking up from a dream,” where “a cloud bubble above his head bursts and disappears,” hence landing him back to reality.

Another example would be from the Comedian and the Symphonist in their encounters with flavor development for desserts. In particular, they are able to “imagine the flavor combinations on their palates” before the actual cooking process itself. To put it differently, they are “cooking inside their heads,” as they possess the ability to imagine sensations before the actual procedure itself. This echoes what Hermé (2015) calls ‘maquettes in my head,’ small models and preliminary sketches in one's mind that depict the actual taste itself, in which he ‘imagines flavors, sensations, textures – and all the emotions they (the finish product) provides’ (p. 11). As portrayed, both instances suggest that these occurrences take place in an imaginary realm, where their mind takes a pause from existence and wanders off into the colorful world of flavors, where they mix, match, and compose harmonious flavors.

Moving forward, pastry chefs have also described their attempts to enter the imaginations of others, in which chefs opportunely dive into the illusory worlds created by novelists and other artists. This is evident in the War General's obsession and journey into the fictional world of

*Steampunk Cinderella* (Figure 3), alongside many others such as *Engineer's* rendition on *Davy Jones* from *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Figure 25), and also the Mad Scientist's fondness for the world of comic books in his rendition of *the Goblin* (Figure 15). Indulging in the worlds of other creators, pastry chefs borrow many symbolic and artistic elements from the fictional stories of others, and portray them through their interpretations and personal reflections of them. In this fictional reality, these chefs tend to be slightly compelled to thematic patterns of the original artists' world. Nonetheless, it reflects a playful journey into a believable world given meaning to by other artists, and it is through each chef's own sense-making and interpretation that dictate the final outcome of their artwork.

Through the imaginations of oneself and of others, pastry chefs travel and indulge in a separate reality filled with provocative stimuli. It is through the interactions in such realities, that pastry chefs bring back ideas as "souvenirs" from their imaginative travels, bringing them to the kitchen for further experimentations and play. These fictional places offer a boundary-less space where ones' limit is only restricted by his/her resourcefulness in imagination. Nonetheless, before such ideas are brought to the kitchen for actualization, most chefs go through a stage of documenting, jotting, and sketching, which brings the ideas one step closer to actualization.

#### *Sketchbooks – "Creative journal"*

Sketchbooks are self-constructed personal spaces that function as both a creative journal and a setting for play. Within this space, pastry chefs keep a daily record of creative events and experiences hidden within its pages. It is also a platform of communication between the artists' subconscious and conscious mind, as chefs transform blurry ideas from one's imagination onto a space that has a visual, bringing it one step closer to actualization. It is a place where creative beginnings happen, where chefs document "flashes" of ideas. In other words, they act as a setting

in which chefs play and manifest a preliminary form of creativity, that also bears close resemblance to a collection of records waiting to be reanimated in the future.

The action of sketching and putting a visual on the space of paper is found present throughout every pastry chef's description of their creative experience, particularly in the construction of showpieces. Some chefs seem to invest in and rely on their sketches more than others (i.e., the War General and the Engineer). Specifically, the War General analogizes his sketches to a "mirror" commenting that "without this mirror you will never know what it might actually look like in real life." The War General takes this mirror to a more extensive level, in which he enlarges them to form a life-size sketch resembling an actual mirror (see Figure 5). He explains since sketches are a "necessary step in actualizing creations," it is hence crucial to "make sure that mirror is accurate." Furthermore, sketchbooks are an important possession near and dear to each chef, in which some (i.e., the Mad Scientist and the Comedian) claim that it is an item that they would to "never leave home without." Intriguingly, sketchbooks emerged to be essential even to the Survivor, despite his "inability" to draw (See Portrait #4). He maintains a sketchbook and explained that it is a way to "take small actions" on inspirations that spontaneously come to mind. "It is a way to document ideas" he stated, and allowing ideas in embryonic stages to incubate within closed pages, only to be revisited with "a pair of fresh eyes" sometime in the future. By looking through these pages from a fresh perspective, past jottings and scribbles may trigger a chain of new ideas, where a chef's mind would diverge in search of new images based off existing ones.

All in all, sketchbooks are evocative and meaningful artifacts that are near and dear to pastry chefs in this study. Some of these chefs see their sketches as more critical to the creative process than others, whilst others treat them as no more than a guide that facilitates their creative process. Nonetheless, they are an important possession that each chef retains as an important

personal belonging, as they function as a tangible and personal self-constructed reality that translates blurry ideas into one with a visual, hence bringing it one step closer to actualization.

*Personal library – “Researching through a library of knowledge”*

*‘Collect books, even if you don’t plan on reading them right away. Nothing is more important than an unread library’*

- Kleon (2012, p. 20)

Apart from the sketchbooks, pastry chefs also consult the works of other pastry chefs for inspiration. As technology offer easy access to knowledge worldwide, each pastry chef possesses their own “library of knowledge,” providing them an intellectual base to pull ideas from. This is best portrayed by the Symphonist, where he burrowed deep into the books of his idol and French pâtisserie revolutionist – Pierre Hermé (see Portrait #5). Reanimating a hallmark flavor combination over two decades old (i.e., *Ispahan*), the Symphonist tinkered and brought it to a new level in his creation of *La Senteur*, which now stands as one of the best dessert creations at the World Pastry Cup. In short, the archives of Pierre Hermé’s repertoire of creations served as a space and basis of inspiration where the Symphonist immersed into. And it is within these spaces where idea seeds were variated and tinkered with to form new creations through one’s personal creative touch.

Such intellectual properties also hold strong sentimental meanings to the Survivor, which was his only form of affordable entertainment during his early years in an unfortunate working environment that he described as “slavery.” Compensated poorly for his efforts, the Survivor would spend his free time in bookstores flipping through the pages of complimentary culinary books on display. Fortunately, he picked up a book that fueled his passion, which he called, “the

book that changed his life” that started a “healing process” (see Portrait 4). It was through these pages that allowed him to look beyond the horizons of a production-oriented kitchen, leading him to a pilgrimage for greater creative endeavors. This book today, serves as a token reminder of his salvation from the gutters of “rotting” during his early years of misfortune. In the present day, he possesses a “library of knowledge,” a collection of books over the years that serve as a basis of inspiration. At the very end of his bookshelf, lies the book that initiated everything – “the book of creative healing.”

Whilst some described the importance of existing records more explicitly than others, existing records and books still reckon as an essential toolkit of knowledge that Malaysian World Pastry Cup goers possess. It is within the shelves and pages that pastry chefs find guidance from industry leaders, allowing them to stay on par with those ahead of the game globally. Although faintly discussed by many other chefs in their portraits, each chef has a noticeable fondness for professional books and periodicals of the industry. Page (2017) comments that ‘the chef’s library’ is where, within these spaces, chefs research and explore trustworthy sources regarding recipes, formulas or techniques, allowing chefs to make informed decisions guided by the wisdoms of experts that came before them (p. 9).

#### *The kitchen – “Space for freestyle expressions”*

The workspace of the kitchen is one that can either kill or fuel a chef’s creative engine and artistic aspirations. Pastry chefs, more often than not, disassociate their creative experiences with the kitchen. The pressures and the time-consuming workloads of the kitchen operation environment inhibit chefs to create, as the Survivor, in particular, calls it an “inhumane and abysmal place of slavery.” This is because the confines, tight schedules, and coworkers of the kitchen space can also create barriers and/or challenges for imaginative energies to twitch and



fidget. For this reason, many chefs seek creative experiences outside of the kitchen, in spaces where chefs can wander into the world of imaginative thinking. Nonetheless, depending on the workplace climate, chefs too can activate imaginative sparks in the kitchen. In contrast to the slavery analogy that the Survivor prefers, the War General described kitchen spaces as a place filled with altruistic senior chefs that resembled “noble beings” and “inspirational figures” who guide young chefs to embrace their artistic self (Portrait #1). For some, the kitchen space spawns creativity, and for others it limited it; the various dynamics that make the kitchen a creative space are somewhat unpredictable.

More particularly, the space of the kitchen resonates to be a place where creativity happens during the actualization of a creative piece. This is often guided by spontaneous ideas during the actualization process, which are fueled by a pastry chef’s inner instinct, emotions, and intuition. The Mad Scientist describes this as a “freestyle expression” where he “goes with the flow,” and “lets the fun takeover” (Portrait #4). This is found to be best manifested in the absence of a plan, where one would be able to build ideas based off his/her current state of ‘creativity’ and ‘feelings,’ improvising every step of the way. The Mad Scientist discusses, that through this “freestyle expression” he is able to create some of the most joyful creative experiences. Nonetheless, this is more likely to occur during the production of showpieces, rather than those of desserts. Because dessert creation requires meticulous attention on the formulas and procedures associated to a fixated recipe, which restricts chefs from “going with the flow” and instead follow the strict scientific rules of pastry production. However, through repetition and mastery of a craft, pastry production can too become an artistic activity. As one has gained familiarity with a craft, he/she would hence be able to embrace the corporeality of a scientifically-bounded activity, where one’s intuition is guided by one’s familiarity with science, which all in all makes pastry preparation an art.

### *Discussion and summary of the poetics of creative space*

This theme uncovered many essences of culinary creativity in relations to pastry chefs' everyday spaces. Throughout this theme, I provided examples where inspirations are triggered, realities are altered, imaginations are documented, and traditions are tinkered, all within the minds and perceptions of Malaysian pastry chefs. It is within these spaces where chefs manifest different phases of creativity. Such phases do not suggest linearity in the creative process, but relational interactions in their day-to-day activities. Moreover, the engagement with showpieces epistemically frames how each chef view reality in different spaces. Because of this engagement, chefs are equipped with a distinct pair of lenses, allowing them to see shapes, colors and patterns in their interaction with everyday practices and objects. This adds empirical support from a phenomenologist's perspective to Feuls' (2018) relational view on culinary innovations, which suggest that culinary creativity manifests at the level of social practices, where inspirations and creativity occurs upon spontaneous encounters during everyday practices (Gherardi, 2012). This study unveils several instances of where creativity occurs, which extends Leschziner's (2015) simple delineation of culinary creativity occurring inside and outside the kitchen to five unique spaces where chefs immerse intimately. In particular, this study submits with rich descriptions through portraiture that elicits the essences and narratives in spaces that fertilizes the creative processes.

The ability to imagine the mouthfeel of a product in an imaginary realm before the actual creation of the product itself resonates greatly from this theme. The imaginary realm is cited as a meaningful place of refuge away from the real world (Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010). From a phenomenological perspective, it resembles close to a holographically rendered experience in one's own imagination. In particular, pastry chefs from this study are able to "imagine the flavor combinations on their palates" before the actual cooking process itself. To put it differently, they are "cooking inside their heads," echoing to what Hermé (2015) calls as building 'maquettes in

his head,' where he describes it as an ability to form flavor models and preliminary sketches in one's mind that depicts the actual sensations itself. In particular, Hermé describes this as the ability to imagine 'flavors, sensations, textures, and all the emotions they (the finish products) provide' (p. 11). This resembles a chef's ability to create the tapestry of a meal experience in an imaginary setting, tasting and experiencing the various sensations before the actual product itself.

Externalizing such ideas from this imaginative realm comes in the form of self-constructed personal spaces in sketchbooks. Sketchbooks function as both a creative journal and a setting for play, where chefs maintain a regular record of creative events and experiences hidden within its pages. These items however, are personal to each chef that are meant to be a communication tool between the ones' subconscious and conscious mind. This draws close to what Ferguson (1994) calls as 'thinking sketches,' which are sketches that designers use in supporting of their individual thinking processes. Such sketches often start off unclear and ambiguous, yet fundamental and substantial to the creative process. They resemble spaces where chefs connect individual threads that would soon transfigure into an embroidery of interwoven knits and strands. It is a space where pastry chefs externalize the initial form of their ideas, where new flavors notes for desserts are formulated, and artistic structures and components for showpieces are symphonized. All in all, sketchbooks are evocative and meaningful artifacts that are near and dear to pastry chefs in this study. They are important possessions that each chef retains as an intimate personal belonging, functioning as a tangible and personal self-constructed reality that translates blurry ideas into one with a visual, bringing it one step closer to actualization.

Regardless whether it is within the pages of their personal sketchbooks or existing books authored by industry leaders, concrete spaces, or even fictional ones in one's imagination, chefs tend to immerse themselves deeply and intimately in such spaces. Each space offers different stimulants that facilitate their creative endeavors, and of course, each chef perceives each space

differently. These discourses align with previous phenomenological discussions that place gets its qualitative character from an individual's own subjectivity (Addyman, 2010; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). It is through each individual's own view of reality in which they enter and perceive space differently, hence allowing them to make their own interpretations shaped by their personal viewpoints of 'being there' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 293). It is a highly subjective stance, shaped in accordance to the perspectives and values of each individual. Despite each chef's highly varied views of space, a common thread remains, as they perceive an intimate connection when encountering with such spaces. Such a connection echoes soundly the works of Bachelard (1994), who described these connections as 'intimate immensity,' which allows one to 'enter into a region of the purest sort of phenomenology – a phenomenology without phenomena' (p. 201). Bachelard (1994) explains that such encounters are closely associated with daydreams, in which a space passively triggers one's own consciousness to travel 'elsewhere,' transporting 'the dreamer outside of the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity' (p. 201). Through this view, it can be contemplated that chef's creations, regardless whether it is in the form of showpieces or desserts, are by-products of their encounters with creative spaces. It is via these intimate immersions into different spaces that allows pastry chefs to extract inspirations and ideas from such journeys, hence allowing them to bring such idea seeds to the kitchen as 'souvenirs' for further experiments and play.

Previous studies on the subject of space and place in the culinary realm often set focus on the meanings in the domestic kitchen, reflecting much instances of memories of cooking with late-family members and food memories related to reverberating experiences (Buckley, 1996; Duruz, 2004). For example, the domestic kitchen environment often recites as a place that solicits the central meaning of 'home,' as it helps unifies the memories of the past with the actions of the present, resembling a place where 'the ordinary becomes extraordinary' (Duruz, 2004, p. 58). This study however, provides much empirical instances of a professional pastry chef's encounter

with space and place both inside and outside of the kitchen, which includes five unique spaces serving as resources for both prompts and signs of creativity. Irrespective whether it is through stimuli-rich spaces away from the kitchen, visionary in one's own imagination, incubating within the pages of one's personal sketchbook, waiting to be discovered through shelves of one's own library, or even in the hustle and bustle of the kitchen, these spaces resonate as a basis for chefs to delve into the state of intimate immensity.

### The Duality of Chefs' Creative Identity

Pastry chefs undergo two major personifications within themselves when engaged in creative experiences, causing a duality of identities. Across portraits they bounce in between the two distinct personas – the artist and the scientist – which allow them to both express one's inner feelings as an artist, yet still rationalize procedures as a scientist during the creative process. In the War General's words, "one cannot live without another," the interaction between the two sheds light on the science behind the making of art, and the art in the development of science. I present this duality using Fine's (1996) connotation of occupational rhetorics, which refers to an individual's identity constituted by a 'set of images that connects one to an unambiguous work world' (p. 91). This suggests that individuals self-construct bundles of meanings for themselves called 'rhetorics' to help associate themselves with different situations at work. In other words, it is a way of 'fitting work into a meaning system' (Fine, 1996, p. 90).

In the context of culinary creativity, the rhetorics of a scientist and an artist resonate deeply in each pastry chef's description of their creative experiences. I present this as a 'duality,' simply because both rhetorics reflect highly contrasting views in which one's way of being revolves around experimentations and empiricism, whilst the other around intuition and inner-senses. With evidence from each portrait, I present these two contrasting self-identities

individually before summarizing and contemplating both rhetorics' essentiality to their profession as a whole.

### *The scientist*

Each pastry chef from this study strongly differentiates the stature of a pastry chef from those of cuisine and hot cooking chefs. They purport that pastry chefs require a greater mastery of scientific elements and an understanding of the science behind the making of art. In short, the scientific epitome resonates in pastry chefs' creative endeavors stronger than those of cuisine or hot cooking chefs. Each participant agreed to the essence of this notion, in which the Mad Scientists noted that hot cooking chefs are more engaged in the "art of cooking" where intuition guides the "seasoning to taste," "the finishing of a sauce," or "how much cooking wine to add into a broth." Whereas pastry chefs on the other hand, are more scientific in nature, as it requires much knowledge behind "how different ingredients and different weightages of each ingredients" influence the final outcome. He explains that the process is much more reliant to theories, understanding, and "scales with one or two decimal points," rather than "judging intuitively by instinct" (See Portrait #3). The War General adds on this note stating that he "thinks like a chemist" when he reads a recipe or when he sees ingredients on countertops. He thinks not about the cooking procedures, but the chemistry involved in the making of art. Through this gaze, he frames the kitchen as a place of experiment and play, pondering to the many possibilities as he pushes the limits of what he understands of pâtisserie. The scientific personification reflects on the understanding of pâtisserie theories that supports the artistic embodiment of culinary creativity. In his own words, "one cannot live without another (referring to the arts and sciences) we are scientists when we formulate our recipes, but artists when we make them" (Portrait #1).

Pastry chefs referred to scientific methods when engaged in culinary creativity, especially in dessert creations that must have a means to an end. The dessert making process takes into consideration “the logic and practicality” of the pastry kitchen’s operations, while ensuring that the outcome still meets the consumers’ satisfaction on the palate. Most pertinently, the procedures have to be documented, making sure that the culinary process is replicable, just as a scientist would with his experimental procedures. The scientist personification suggests that there is “more to pastry than what meets the eye” in pâtisserie creations, as it takes into account the various “chemistry” involved in the production process, while also “managing the various senses” during the point of consumer consumption; all in which considers a “sensitive calculation of various variables.”

Just like any scientist embarking on a new research journey, pastry chefs also have a rich understanding of past literature from respectable sources of their profession’s predecessors. Through this mastery of existing knowledge and traditions, pastry chefs are able to pinpoint culinary gaps to exploit or areas to variate. It goes beyond the understanding of the chemical reactions of ingredients, but also considers recipe origins, backstories, and historical meanings that allow pastry chefs to purposefully variate through his/her view and touch. Thoughtfulness, notions, details, and meanings are incorporated into existing products, which provide pastry chefs a rich anthropological understanding. As with any profession, there is a need to understand the customs, practices, artifacts, and history of their predecessors. Understanding the professions and literature in detail, and knowing how to appreciate its core meanings and foundation, hence allows pastry chefs to “transgress” in full knowledge and consciousness. In short, a mastery of past knowledge and rules is a vital essence of the scientific persona, as it is what allows the artistic persona to flourish in full flight in manifesting creativity.

### *The artist*

Despite paying homage to the science behind the making of art, each pastry chef adds that ‘an artistic touch’ is what separates a chef’s stature from another, hence allowing chefs to join the ranks as one of the “divines” of the profession. In the creation of desserts, it more often than not, comes in the form of poetry and storytelling. This was vivid in the Jester’s creation *Pandora’s Box*, which was aimed to create an experiential value for those who consume it (See Portrait #2). In particular, the Jester “played with senses” and added an “emotional touch” to the various components of his dessert. There was a story behind the dessert, signifying something mystical, in which he described, “the concept is to have the judges open Pandora’s Box and to create an experience that they not only smell the aromas of the yuzu, but also see it...” (*Portrait #2*). *Pandora’s Box* is an example of a dessert with a meaningful story told by the Jester, that possessing a harmonious representation of flavors all packaged in an extravagant fashion behind an experiential mystical appeal. The notions of ‘play’ and ‘the tinkering of emotions’ are what heightened the highly scientific process of creation into one with poignant attachments and meanings. As implied, the analogies used to describe each pastry chefs’ engagement with creativity often echoes the work comparisons of those in the field of the arts, such as poetry, music, and films. Resonant examples from the portraits would be how pastry chefs view the creations of new desserts as a process of harmonizing “main actors” and “supporting casts,” as well as the notion of “symphonizing melodies” in the development of flavor. Guided by the concept of creative harmony, pastry chefs view their creations as detailed compositions of various sensorial and chemical components parceled together by an overarching meaning (e.g., stories & poetries). It is through such analogies with those in the field of the arts, where pastry chefs connect themselves with the artistic realm at best. This gears them to view their creation process as “architecting structures and appeals,” “designing a screenplay with main actors and supporting cast members,” and even a “freestyle expression of the creative self.”



In this study, the most resonant evidence of the artist personification is portrayed in chefs' engagement in showpieces creations, as it ties pastry chefs to the artist rhetoric in the most intimate of ways. To reiterate, showpieces serve as "platforms" that resemble "playgrounds" where the role of "imagination takes over." It is the outcome of one's artistic self, a process that allows one's perceive sense of lack to externalize onto an artistic piece. More importantly, it is within showpieces where chefs create artistic personalities for themselves, such as the Comedian fondness of incorporating humoristic elements to his designs (Portrait #8), the Mad Scientist's preference in darker renderings in his portrayal of "scary" and "fearful" arts (Portrait #3), and also the "angelic" and "elegant" portrayal of the Quiet Princess (Portrait #9). Moreover, it is within pastry chefs' involvement with showpieces that equips them to view reality differently, in which they see shapes and colors in the world and everyday objects. It is almost as if they see reality through a different pair of lenses – the lenses of a showpiece artist. This pair of lenses is a powerful tool, because it connects chefs to an expression-filled product of creativity that offers them a space to play and self-express, fortifying the artistic persona.

In short, the artistic personification resonates throughout the life worlds of Malaysian World Pastry Cup participants. Each pastry chef rhetorically assures oneself as an artist by viewing oneself as a poet and a storyteller in both the creation of desserts and showpieces. They analogize the harmonizing process of their products as the "bringer of stories" and "the balancer of melodies." In essence, despite each pastry chef contemplating that the pâtisserie is a work of science, it still resonates as a product of art.

#### *Discussion and summary of the duality of chefs' creative identity*

It is implied that both personifications, albeit contrasting in stances, comes together to inform pastry chefs during the creative process. More particularly, the artistic personification is

informed with scientific rationalism, while the scientific personification is portrayed by one's innate desire to create through one's inner senses. Both rhetorics are inseparable from one another insofar that "one cannot live without the other." In regards to past conceptualizations on chefs' occupational rhetoric, Fine (1996) has already depicted that the artistic rhetoric is what ties restaurant cooks to the pinnacle of work itself, which resembles the zenith of the profession, portraying glamour and entitlement. In particular, Fine suggests that artistic rhetoric comes to life in twofold. First, it occurs when cooks admit that their outcomes are the products of one's own artistic creativity; and second, it is when they acknowledge that their products are appreciated by an audience (i.e., the consumers). Not only has this study evidently portrayed Fine's conceptualization of the artistic rhetoric in the creative experiences of the pastry chefs, but it also adds greater enrichment, as it supplies how the artistic rhetoric is interweaved with the scientific personification, which arguably could stand alone as a distinct rhetoric by its own.

As contemplated, *pâtisserie* creations, despite resonating as a work of art, resemble a complicated creation that accounts for the various chemical reactions and scientific procedures. The interchange between the two personifications occurs unconsciously, where one may be thinking that he/she is producing a task of pure artistry, where actually his/her mastery of scientific elements is what fuels the artistic endeavor. For example, chocolate, despite being a highly scientific product that requires careful control and understanding of the crystallization process of cocoa butter (Labensky et al., 2009), resembles to what is best described as an "ingredient of play." In other words, instead of viewing chocolate as a complex ingredient, pastry chefs in this study have the artistic view to translate a highly scientific product into one that lies on a continuum between liquid and solid states. This vantage point is adopted intuitively, but it is impossible without preliminary mastery and understanding about the chocolate crystallization process.

This duality comes together in harmonious fashion in the creative process, in which the interaction between the two personas does not overshadow one another, but supports and reinforces the phenomenon of culinary creativity. The artistic persona is grounded by scientific rationalism, and likewise, the scientific persona is externalized and portrayed in artistic fashion. “One cannot live without the other,” resembling much a harmonious duet that supports, enhances, and brings out the best in a melodious composition. It is perhaps because of this duality that causes past scholars to recognize pastry chefs as a more profound and difficult classification of cookery as compared to those of hot cooking (Ferguson & Zukin, 1998). It is because of the scientific values associated to the preparation process of pâtisserie creation where Ferguson and Zukin (1998) note that the technical skills of pastry are more difficult to acquire than those of other culinary categories.

In summary, pastry chefs’ engagement of culinary creativity brings out the scientist (in understanding of theories, backgrounds and histories) that supports the artist (in allowing intuition to dictate and one’s inner sense to guide artistic movement). This validates the consideration that there is much interaction between the two personifications, and that there is much to consider about the science behind the making of art, and the art in the development of science.

### Imaginative Episodes

Imaginative episodes reflect the many instances of total absorption and fluency of mentalistic thoughts during pastry chefs’ creative processes. It highlights the mental process of putting pieces together, building, holographically rendering, and even during the actualization of a piece. Resonantly, the concept of ‘flow’ permeates this theme greatly, which is no stranger to creativity studies. Flow resembles an autotelic and intrinsically rewarding experience that occurs

when a balance in challenge and skill is met (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In the context of phenomenology, flow has been described as a hypnotic state (Grove & Lewis, 1996), where one is detached from surroundings and time, resulting into an engagement of what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls ‘optimal experience.’ To further discuss imaginative episodes in relations to the famed concept of flow, I nest these occurrences within three categories – (1) inside the mind of a pastry chef, (2) between the pages of one’s sketchbooks, and (3) during the point of actualization itself.

#### *Inside the mind of a pastry chef*

The first resonant occurrence of imaginative episodes and flow was surprisingly not expressed in the act of the artistic activity itself as previous scholars might suggest (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Nelson & Rawlings, 2007), but rather in a preliminary phase away from the kitchen. This occurrence is often experienced when pastry chefs’ imaginations wander into the unknown, embarking into day-dreams of culinary imaginations and creativity. Often initiated by the sense of emptiness as discussed in the harmony of showpiece creations, these instances of flow befall not during the actualization of the art itself (e.g., the actual cooking process), but before the activity and through systemic, relational, and nonlinear points of the creative process (Feuls, 2018; Stierand et al., 2014).

In particular, pastry chefs in this study experienced the flow state in rather spontaneous imaginative episodes, typically during interactions with different creative spaces. This was present when the War General was obsessively lost in the moment when digging deep into the fictional spaces of fantasies (See Portrait #1), in which he would lose himself into various fictional stories and concepts, all to elucidate a retelling of a story. Another instance would be how the Symphonist combines flavors in an imaginary setting. This is best describe as a process

of “cooking inside one’s head,” in which a creative tapestry of flavors, textures, and various other elements are constructed in one’s imagination. This resembles a chef’s ability to create the tapestry of a meal experience in an imaginary setting, tasting and experiencing the various sensations before the actual product itself.

Yet, the best explications of imaginative episodes and flow is once again portrayed by the Jester’s informative narration of his interdimensional travels, in which he “spaces out” and “travels to an alternate reality” (see Portrait #2). Equipped with an “imaginary pencil and sketchbook,” the Jester has described his imaginative episodes as the ability to fictionalize himself sketching the designs and ideas in an isolated unknown reality. This contact with the creative mind allows him to create tapestries and gestalts in a state of intimate intimacy (Bachelard, 1994), while also affecting him to experience a sudden displacement in time and consciousness, which is a key feature of the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This experience is, however, often interrupted by the happenings of the real world, causing him to “exit” the flow state bearing much semblance to “waking up from a dream.” And just like a dream, he forgets many parts of it. Fortunately, it is through his “imaginary sketches” where the Jester remembers essential elements from his short trip to the “‘other’ world,” in which he would take quick action in documenting in his sketchbook. Yearning for more of such optimal experiences, he exclaimed that he “needs to enter that world,” because he would never know “when and where the next one may come.” While this rawest form of intimate intimacy cannot be replicated with full authenticity, it is through his habitual activity of documenting and sketching that offers the Jester an opportunity to recreate the optimal experience on paper. This documentation process reflects a unique trademark of pastry chefs’ creativity process, because it registers evidence of one’s travels into an imaginary realm.

*Between the pages of one's sketchbook – "The Pause Button"*

Sketchbooks, as contemplated throughout this study, are personal journals that act as a personal setting for eliciting creativity. It is within the pages of one's sketchbook where this study unravels a rather unique quality of how pastry chefs elicit imaginations and flow. Unique to the experience, this setting communicates the artist's subconscious and conscious mind, by elucidating what was a blurry image into one that has a face and a visual. Exclusive to the imagination process, it is within these pages where one's imagination takes a pause, as these sketches and jottings are allowed to incubate in between pages as one stops putting pencil to paper. This pause allows pastry chefs to step back from the optimal experience of the flow state and reflect on what was seemingly translated from one's subconscious. In other words, this pause places a punctuation on the flow experience, where one's draft of an imaginative experience is stored and incubated, only to be revisited with a fresh pair of eyes in the future.

Each revisit allows pastry chefs to see new possibilities from a renewed perspective in which past jottings could trigger new trends of thought, potentially allowing each one to re-immense oneself into a renewed imaginative episode again. For example, the Survivor commented that such documented traces could trigger to what he calls "Pinterest in his head," where his mind would diverge in search of new images based off existing records (See Portrait #4). In other words, the pages of one's creative journal serves as a storage space where ideas in an embryonic stage to incubate, which allows the traces of one's imaginative episodes to rest resembling close to what I analogize as a "pause button." This is crucial to the creative process, as Dewey (2005) suggested that pauses and punctuations in an experience offers one to reflect and evaluate of one's performance, hence defining the quality of an experience. In particular, by following Dewey's school of thought, the "pause button" offers pastry chefs a resting phase to rejuvenate one's creative energy. This albeit contradicts with what Csikszentmihalyi calls as 'disruptions' to the flow experience, instead functions as an interval that potentially allows one to

improve on one's the initial idea. After all, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) did compare flow to 'a form of energy' (p. 69), and energy, much like one's stamina, would soon reach an eventual point of depletion.

The ability to pause one's imaginative episodes inside the space of a sketchbook, only to revisit its traces from a fresh perspective, allows the pastry chef to potentially re-immers oneself into the flow state again. Such instances of pauses were found consistent with previous works related to performance based experiences (e.g., Augustine & Zoss, 2006; Dewey, 2005). Augustine and Zoss (2006) in investigating how students experience the learning process through reading suggested that students would take pauses between passages to allow one's emotions, memories, and even relationships to permeate the experiences. This allows one's engagement with the reading activity to become more meaningful, educative, and intimate. As the flow state is remarked as a highly desirable state of mind that urges people to replicate and reproduce (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), it is within the sketchbooks of pastry chefs where trails and evidence from the flow state are documented closest to its rawest of forms, resembling a documentation of creative stimuli. The "resume button" may arguably be harder to initiate than the "pause button," nonetheless, it is within such documentations, where creative stimuli are stored to potentially allow one to reenter the optimal experience in full light. Notably, this pause may potentially last for moments or even for years, as Hermé (2015) have even noted that some of his documented ideas were set aside for years before actually revisited and exploited. Regardless of the pause duration, one cannot put a timeframe on the incubation process, as the creative process requires spontaneity where the creation only ends when the creator finally "hears the shutting of the door" (Doyle, 1976, p. 302). As the incubating ideas finally reach a form that is concrete enough to be executed, the next imaginative episode then occurs referring to the actualization process itself.

*Actualization – “A freestyle expression”*

The third and final strand of the imagination experience echoes much closer to the many existing works on artistic creativity (e.g., Doyle, 1998; Nelson & Rawlings, 2007; Reinders, 1992; Yokochi & Okada, 2005). This state occurs during the product actualization process, where all preliminary forms of the creative process finally reach the moment of execution. In the context of hot cooking, the execution process is arguably more adherent to the flow state, as chefs are more engaged with their intuitive senses allowing them to “go with the flow.” Leschziner (2015) supports this, by claiming that elite chefs often engage in such states as they improvise dishes off pure intuition during the cooking process. However, it is arguable that the flow state as experienced by hot cooking chef is inapplicable to pâtisserie. This is because the state of flow could be interrupted by the ‘scientist within,’ which may cause obstacles and disruptions during the execution process, as one would constantly reflect upon the scientific rationalism that informs the artistic process. Borkenhagen (2017) for one, supports this, as he puts forward that chefs who are in pursuit to learn the greater scientific values behind culinary arts ‘poses a potential threat to the subjective, intuition-driven logic of culinary creativity’ (p. 630). This train of thought was found evident across portraits.

Despite resonating as a work of art, the execution experience of desserts is still governed by scientific reasoning behind each ingredients’ chemistry. However, when chefs are placed in the context of a pressured competition environment, this may as well prove otherwise. As my portraits suggest, the preparation phase for the prestigious World Pastry Cup demands countless practice trials of the execution process itself. The Mad Scientist in particular depicted that he has engaged in at least fifty trials to gain familiarity in executing the ice-cream cake called *Illumination* before the actual event (See Portrait #3). It is through substantial reiteration, pastry chefs are able to engage in flow during the actualization process, as the complex activity inherently becomes part and soul of the creators’ body, which allows one to engage in an



effortless and fluent experience of execution, rather than one that requires a complex inspection and clarification. As Stierand and Dörfler (2015) describe, chefs “thrive during activities for which the chefs have learned to automatize the execution process” (p. 182), and it is within such automatized familiarities where chefs embrace complications and intricacies, and thus transpiring them through the state of flow.

Furthermore, imaginative episodes permeate the many instances of showpiece executions, especially for those that comes in the absence of a plan. This allows the artist to fully embrace one’s intuitive sense in actualizing a showpiece, which focuses entirely on the spontaneity of the artistic endeavor itself. The Mad Scientist for one describes this spontaneous action as a “freestyle expression” where he “lets the fun takeover” (See Portrait #3) At times, he prefers not to sketch at all, because he feels that sketches commit him to follow a pre-planned idea. On occasion, he would build ideas based off his current state of ‘creativity’ and ‘feelings,’ improvising as he goes in the actualization process. He discusses, that if one were to sketch out an idea, there are great chances that he/she would “follow the sketch as it is.” Instead, he debates that some of the most joyful creative experiences come from expressions “without a plan,” which allows him to “feel every touch as it comes” and “go with the flow.” This rendition of the artistic creative experience overlaps with Reinders’ (1992) as well as Yokochi and Okada’s (2005) work, in which they suggest that the artistic creativity process is one of an interactive process between the artist and the object. In particular, it is through the artist’s engagement with his/her materials where an intimate dialogue emerges, allowing one to sense whether a piece goes together with the whole or not. This enjoyable activity resonates as an autotelic experience, which postulates each chef’s immersion in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1996) peak human experience – the flow state.

### *Summary of imaginative episodes*

By delineating the creativity process into phases of one's mind, documentation, and actualization brings today's knowledge one step closer to understand the concept of flow in relations to the culinary profession. It must be stated though, that this study does not claim to have extended the prevalent flow experience to have a mystical "pause or resume button," neither does it claim that the role of intuition is of novelty that adds great distinctions to what existing literature understands of flow. Instead, what I simply imply is that in each interviewed Malaysian pastry chef's resonant encounter with the culinary creativity phenomenon, he/she describes the fluency of his/her encounter with the flow experience closely as a punctuated incubation process as well as an intuitive expressionistic confrontation with their artistic materials. It is through the philosophical lenses of a phenomenologist and the voice of a portraitist in which the essences of the flow experience were captured and portrayed in this manner. All in which captures the complex phenomenon of culinary creativity in a unique perspective that would otherwise fail to be recognized.

### Chapter Summary

This section portrayed that the essences of pastry chefs' culinary creativity are channeled mainly towards two distinct products – desserts and showpieces – in which the concept of creative harmony encapsulates the entire experience. These creations, especially showpieces, help frame how chefs see and view the everyday objects and spaces. On this note, pastry chefs draw inspirations and ideas from five distinct creative spaces – opportunity/stimuli rich spaces, fictional spaces, sketchbooks, personal libraries, and kitchens. With this in mind, pastry chefs' desserts and showpieces can be seen as by-products of their encounters with different creative spaces. Furthermore, a paradox between creative identities exists during their encounter with the

creative process itself, in which pastry chefs simultaneously bounces off two personifications (the artist and the scientist) that may seemingly contradict one another, yet fuel the creative process in a harmonious manner. Lastly, they engage in the creative experience through the imaginative episodes nested within three unique categories – inside the minds of a pastry chef, between the pages of one’s sketchbook, and also the actualization process itself. Most unique to this study, is that chefs describe imaginative episodes in the documentation process (sketchbooks) to possess an “pause button” that punctuates the flow experience and the imaginative episode. This allows one room for reflection and idea incubation, all in which facilitates pastry chefs’ creative process in producing a definitive enough idea worth actualizing.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the essences of culinary creativity through the lifeworld of Malaysian pastry chefs who participated in the prestigious World Pastry Cup. The specific research objectives were:

- RQ1. What are the essences of Malaysian pastry chefs' culinary creativity?
- RQ2. How does culinary creativity compare to artistic creativity?

In this chapter, I open with first addressing RQ1, which in twofold, also summarizes the findings across the past three chapters. In particular, I provide a composite description of the essences of culinary creativity, which resembles a descriptive and informative passage that allows one to grasp the important structures of pastry chefs' creative experiences (Creswell, 2012; Polkinghorne, 1989). This is then followed by attending to RQ2, which past studies associated with artistic creativity pertaining to the discoveries of this study were thoughtfully discussed. This in particular, highlights the core differences between culinary creativity and those of other artistic creativity. The discussion is then followed by the contributions that this study potentially

withholds to both theory and practice. And lastly, it closes with limitations of the study, alongside suggestions for future research.

### Summary of Findings & Revisiting the Research Purpose

Across Chapter IV and V, this study revealed the individual essences of nine distinct pastry chefs who partook in the World Pastry Cup on Malaysia's behalf. Using portraiture as a vessel to portray my data, this study benefits from an angle that captures the essences of culinary creativity exclusive to each individual, without jeopardizing the philosophical stances that a phenomenologist should bear (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This is then followed by a secondary analysis, in which the many similarities and nuances across portraits were discussed and brought together into one holistic portrayal in Chapter VI. Specifically, Chapter VI pulled together the various clustered materials from across portraits and portrayed them into four major themes that encapsulate the essences of culinary creativity – (1) *creative harmony*, (2) *the poetics of creative space*, (3) *the duality of chefs' creative identity*, and (4) *imaginative episodes*. Moreover, I also offered discussion points for each theme by drawing theories and comparing findings from previous relevant works.

Moving forward, the purpose of this section is to revisit the initial research objectives, and to discuss the findings pertains to the research objectives. This section first opens with addressing the complicated structure of culinary creativity as perceived by Malaysia World Pastry Cup contenders (RQ1), which by default also summarizes findings across the past three chapters. This is then followed by a discussion that aligns the essences of culinary creativity against the backdrop of existing works on the artistic creativity phenomenon, hence highlighting the various nuances and similarities between the lived experience of culinary creativity and artistic creativity (RQ2).

In this study, the phenomenon of culinary creativity revolves around two distinct creations – desserts and showpieces. Both creations are guided by the overarching concept of ‘creative harmony,’ which resembles the ability to not only compose a balanced creation that satisfies sensory qualities, but also entails emotional and storytelling attributes. For desserts, harmony is emphasized on the delivery of flavor, which resembles the “rightful spirit of chefs,” and “a chef’s ultimate weapon.” It also emulates much semblance to sensorial poetry, resonating as a balanced composition of essential flavors and sensorial attributes, gift-wrapped and cinematically theatricalize with an artistic touch. The creative process of showpieces on the other hand, reflects a self-fulfilling artistic endeavor aimed to satisfy a chef’s sense of emptiness within. Despite being notoriously portrayed as wasteful and excessive items (Adams, 2011), pastry chefs view them as meaningful and intimate artistic outputs that resemble a “home and sanctuary” for one’s creative self. In essence, while desserts tie pastry chefs to the core of the profession through creating sensorial nourishments; showpieces on the other hand, connect chefs to the artistic personification in the most intimate of ways by allowing chefs to externalize something “inside” that “wants to come out.”

Both creations frame how pastry chefs see and interact with the world around them, but it is through the engagement with showpieces that exclusively equips pastry chefs with a unique set of lenses that allow them to see shapes, colors, and artistic patterns in everyday objects and spaces. To an extent, pastry chefs’ creations can be described as by-products of their encounters with different creative spaces. In particular, pastry chefs engage in creativity poetically in five unique spaces. The first are opportunity/stimuli-rich spaces, which are actual existing spaces away from the hustle and bustle of a kitchen. Such spaces allow pastry chefs to be in contact with his/her creative spirit by exposing oneself to the many creative stimuli present in those areas, which allows one to diverge and wander into various imaginative possibilities. The second

involves spaces existing in a fictional world created by one's imagination. The ability to imagine the mouthfeel of a product, and create holographical rendered experiences in an imaginary realm resonates as key essences across portraits in such spaces. In short, fictional spaces offer a setting of refuge outside of reality, a place with no boundaries where one's limit is only restricted by his/her resourcefulness in imagination. In addition pastry chefs have also described their attempts to enter the imaginations of others, such as the illusory worlds of those created by novelists and other artists. Indulging in the worlds of other creators, pastry chefs borrow many symbolic and artistic elements from the fictional stories of others, resembling a playful journey into a believable world given meaning to by other artists.

The third are sketchbooks, which are self-constructed personal spaces that function as both a creative journal and a setting for play. Within this space, pastry chefs immerse into a preliminary form of creativity that communicates the artists' subconscious and conscious mind. In this space, pastry chefs transform blurry ideas from one's imagination onto a space that has a visual, hence bringing it one step closer to actualization. The fourth are personal libraries that serve as an intellectual base for pastry chefs to pull ideas and consult from. Each pastry chef inherently possesses their own personal "library of knowledge," occupied with professional books and periodicals from the industry, which allows them to make informed decisions guided by the wisdoms of those who came before them. Last but not least, is the space of the kitchen itself. Depending on the workplace climate, the kitchen can either kill or fuel a chef's creative engine and artistic aspiration. Nonetheless, the space of the kitchen resonates as a place where creativity happens during the actualization of a creative piece, often guided by spontaneous ideas befalling during actualization process that are fueled by a chef's inner instinct, emotions, and intuition. In essence, by drawing much relevance to the early works of Bachelard (1994), the interactions with each creative space passively triggers one's own consciousness to travel 'elsewhere,' transporting 'the dreamer outside of the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity' (p. 201).

To reiterate, pastry chefs' creations can be seen as by-products of their encounters with these creative spaces. It is via these intimate immersions into different spaces that allows pastry chefs to extract inspirations and ideas from such journeys, hence allowing them to bring such ideas to the kitchen as 'souvenirs' for further experiments and play.

In addition, pastry chefs battle through two major personifications within themselves – the artist and the scientist – which causes a duality of creative identities. Both personifications albeit contrasting in nature, comes together to inform pastry chefs during the creative process. More particularly, the artist personification is informed with scientific rationalism, while the scientist personification is externalized and portrayed in artistic fashion. Both personas are inseparable from one another insofar that “one cannot live without the other.” This duality comes together in harmonious fashion in the creative process, in which the interaction between the two personas does not overshadow one another, but supports and reinforces the phenomenon of creativity.

Furthermore, the creativity process resembled best to imaginative episodes, which shares overlaps with the concept of flow, which refers to an hypnotic state (Grove & Lewis, 1996) where one is detached from one's surroundings and the construct of time, resulting into an engagement of what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls 'optimal experience.' Pastry chefs experience imaginative episodes pertaining to three exclusive dynamics, the first occurs before the actual creation inside the mind of the pastry chef. The second occurs between the pages of a sketchbook, where one's inspirations and imaginations are documented and incubated. Unique to this study, it is within the pages of one's sketchbook where each chef's creative episode takes a pause, as sketched ideas and jottings are allowed to incubate in between pages as chefs stop putting pencil to paper. This pause allows pastry chefs to step back from the optimal experience and reflect on what was seemingly translated from one's subconscious. In other words, this pause places a punctuation on the flow experience, where one's draft of an imaginative experience is stored and incubated, only



to be revisited with a fresh perspective, potentially re-immersing oneself into the flow state again. Lastly, the third imagination dynamic echoes much resemblance to past studies on artistic creativity (e.g., Nelson & Rawlings, 2007; Reinders, 1992), which concerns with how the artist engages with his/her artistic materials during the actualization process, allowing one to immerse into an autotelic state, also known as the pinnacle of human experiences – flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996).

In summary, the essences of pastry chefs' culinary creativity are channeled mainly towards two distinct products – desserts and showpieces – in which the concept of creative harmony encapsulates the entire experience. These creations, especially showpieces, help frame how chefs see and view the everyday objects and spaces. On this note, pastry chefs draw inspirations and ideas from five distinct creative spaces – opportunity/stimuli rich spaces, fictional spaces, sketchbooks, personal libraries, and kitchens. With this in mind, pastry chefs' desserts and showpieces can be seen as by-products of their encounters with different creative spaces. Furthermore, a paradox between creative identities exists during their encounter with the creative process itself, in which pastry chefs simultaneously bounces off two personifications (the artist and the scientist) that may seemingly contradict one another, yet fuel the creative process in a harmonious manner. Lastly, they engage in the creative experience through the imaginative episodes nested within three unique categories – inside the minds of a pastry chef, between the pages of one's sketchbook, and also the actualization process itself. Most unique to this study, is that chefs describe imaginative episodes in the documentation process (sketchbooks) to possess a “pause button” that punctuates the flow experience and the imaginative episode. This allows one room for reflection and idea incubation, all in which facilitates pastry chefs' creative process in producing a definitive enough idea worth actualizing.

### *Culinary creativity versus artistic creativity*

In comparing culinary creativity to the likes of other artistic creativity, I draw reference from two studies that adopted rigorous phenomenological approaches in tackling artistic creativity heads on (i.e., Nelson & Rawlings; Reinders, 1992). Reinders (1992), studied three internationally renowned artists comprising of a choreographer, a music composer, and a painter; whilst Nelson and Rawlings (2007) on the other hand, interviewed eleven diverse artists from those of musicians, visual artists, writers, and theatre/playwright directors. Both studies reinforce one another, which to some extent, are applauded to encompass the phenomenon of artistic creativity as perceived by a diverse group of artists. But the question remains whether culinary creativity in the eyes of pastry chefs, which are yet another form of art (Julmi & Scherm, 2015), follows the same patterns as those Reinders (1992) as well as Nelson and Rawlings' (2007). This section hence discusses the various overlaps and nuances that each study brings to literature concerning both culinary and artistic creativity phenomena.

#### Comparisons with Reinders' (1992) phenomenological study

Reinders' (1992) study concluded that artistic creativity reflects as an interactive dialogue with the artistic object. The initiation of the artistic creative process is self-triggered through a perceived sense of lack, causing the artist to engage in an ongoing process of exploration and discovery. This process involves the artist manipulating artistic materials to bring out the expressive possibilities that it entails. To begin with, the notion of a perceived sense of lack was found present in this study in the motives behind pastry chefs' engagement with showpieces. These showpiece endeavors clearly emerged in this study as a way to self-express one's creative soul and spirit, serving as 'playgrounds' that allows them to externalize something within that "wants to come out." This in essence, stimulates pastry chefs to embark on a creative journey of

continuously exploring possibilities to fulfil this sense of lack, resonating many similarities to those of Reinders' depiction of an internal lack (1992).

In addition, Reinders (1992) study focused profoundly upon artists' attitudes during exploratory process. Specifically, three paradoxical attitudes emerged from her findings – (1) purposive-playfulness, (2) circumscribed indeterminacy, and (3) distant engagement. *Purposive-playfulness* refers to the active manipulation of the artists' materials and ideas in a playful exploratory manner in attempts to materialize the artwork. *Circumscribed indeterminacy* refers to an attitude in which the artist intentionally holds back past experiences or knowledge during the creative process, and instead, instill trust onto his/her own artistic intuition in recognizing new emerging artistic patterns. And lastly, *distant engagement* denotes the artist's attitudinal choice to take an alternative standpoint, by viewing artistic patterns and structures from an audience's perspective. In this study, it is vivid that the notion of purposive-playfulness resonates during each pastry chef's encounter with culinary creativity. Each pastry chef approached their creative process as a "fun and playful" endeavor, especially when they analogize themselves to storytellers during the process, all in which allows them to engage in an enjoyable course of creating. Moving forward, pastry chefs have also found to view their art from an audience perspective when creating. This was however slightly faintly presented in this study, nevertheless resonates as an important attitude particularly in the creation of desserts, as desserts at its very essence, and is creations meant for the customer itself. However, this study showed no traces of pastry chefs practicing *circumscribed indeterminacy*. Instead of withholding past knowledge and experiences, pastry chefs' creations are built upon the many experiences that came before them, which helps guide and help them make informed decisions during their creative encounters. The irrelevance of *circumscribed indeterminacy* was also shown in Nelson and Rawlings' (2007) work, where they have argued that while there was definitely a sense of trust in one's creative

capacity in performing their arts, their findings however, did not indicate any traces of artists holding ‘knowledge at bay’ (p. 241).

#### Comparisons with Nelson and Rawlings’ (2007) phenomenological study

While Reinders’ (1992) approach brought up artists’ attitudinal shifts towards their art, Nelson and Rawlings’ (2007) on the hand, emphasized heavily on three interwoven psychological dynamics that permeates the artistic creativity process – (1) intuition-analytical, (2) unity-division, and (3) freedom-constraint. The *intuition-analytical dynamic* reflects a constant shift from intuitive states to analytical states during the creative process. While the intuitive state allows artists to engage in flow in producing their art, they would subconsciously move towards a more analytical state, where they ruminate upon critical considerations that would dictate the quality of the piece. The intuitive state however, well aligns with this study’s concept of creative harmony, as it is through an artist’s intuitive senses in which artists are able to recognize whether certain artistic aspects ‘belong to the final piece’ (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007, p. 240). This process of ‘intuitive recognition’ also echoes the consultation of the artist personification within pastry chefs, which allows one to follow intuitive senses when creating a harmonious composition, regardless whether it is about flavors in a dessert or an aesthetic story element on a showpiece.

Moving forward, the second dynamic (i.e., *unity-division*) is intimately interwoven to the first, as quoted,

*The dominance of intuition and the immersion in the artistic activity give rise to a unity in sense of self... There is, at this point, no distinction between the artist and the medium. However, corresponding with the movement towards the more analytical mode, division reappears in the artist’s experience. (p. 23)*

This suggests that a shift towards the analytical mode from the initial intuitive state would cause a separation between the artist and his/her object, as they take up an analytical standpoint of judging and critically examining their own work. Lastly, the *freedom-constraint dynamic*, which is also closely related to the previous two, suggest that the state of artistic freedom is best portrayed and represented when engaged in an intuitive mental state, whilst again, a shift towards the analytical state causes not only division, but also cause a constraining and restrictive pole.

Having stated, the intuition-analysis shift bears close semblance to pastry chef's duality of identities in the creative process, whereby pastry chefs subconsciously consult both the artist and the scientist within when creating. Consistent with Nelson and Rawlings (2007), this study recognized that the shift of focus occurs passively rather than purposively, reflecting an integral part of the creative process. This study however does not show the link between pastry chefs' engagement with identities tied to the dynamic of unity-division, neither does the dynamic of freedom-constraint. Nonetheless, given the interlinked nature of the three dynamics (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007), there are possibilities that the two latter dynamics do exist in the pastry chef's encounter with culinary creativity. Whilst this study does not suggest that these dynamics are absent in entirety in the culinary creativity phenomenon, it showed however no empirical evidence of such psychological occurrences.

#### The distinct essences of culinary creativity

Distinct from Reinders' (1992) as well as Nelson and Rawlings' (2007) findings, this study uncovered several aspects that separate culinary creativity from those of other arts. For one, this study delineated creativity into three unique occurrences – (1) a preliminary stage inside one's mind, (2) within the pages of one's sketchbook, and (3) the process of actualization itself. The preliminary creative phase involves an active search and exposure to creative stimuli from

different creative spaces, followed by a habitual documentation process. This preliminary phase however, was not showcased in the two phenomenological studies that came before this study, as their findings and analysis focused entirely upon the process of actualization itself, hence omitting the inspirations and preliminary seeds that initiated the process. The portrayal of creative spaces adds great richness to existing literature on the matter, as it not only answers the question of “where creativity happens,” but also adds greater contexts to where inspirations and creativity are initiated. Space has in the past been portrayed as highly influential settings in phenomenology, as Addyman (2010) states “for a phenomenologist, place gets its qualitative character from the human body which enters and perceives it and by which it is known” (p. 115). This suggests that spaces are highly influential but yet subjective to the eyes of the beholder, as “one cannot know place except through one’s body” (Addyman, 2010, p. 116). As this study showcased that different creative spaces possess the capacity to inherently inspire one through various creative stimuli, these spaces thus are crucial elements to pastry chefs and artists alike in their creative endeavors. Hence, this study submits to be irremovable from the creative experience, as ideas and inspirations are inseparable from the creative experience as a whole (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer, & Ryan, 2010).

Moreover, by using portraiture as a vehicle to express and portray the essences of culinary creativity, this study perhaps uncovered various humanistic qualities of the phenomenon that would otherwise be left unanswered. In particular, it is through the philosophical stance of a phenomenologist and the voice of a portraitist that this study uncovered the human hardship as well as joy that were hidden behind each pastry chefs’ encounter with the phenomenon. Without these frameworks, the emergent themes of the poetics of creative space, the duality of a chef’s creative identities, as well as exclusive findings such as the “pause button” may fail to even be discovered. Whilst the findings of this study overlaps with those of previous two phenomenological studies that viewed artistic creativity from both an attitudinal perspective

(Reinders, 1992) and psychological perspectives (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007), this study however, through the lenses of a portraitist, extracted various hidden humanistic essences that would otherwise fail to emerge. As Page (2017) specifically relates the culinary creativity as a complex phenomenon that engages of sensorial qualities of a human's mind and soul. This study has uncovered various elements that not only supports this viewpoint, but also enhances it in many respects. The constructed meanings of different spaces, self-fulfillment in harmonizing and expressing flavors and showpieces, and the dynamics that encapsulates different imaginative episodes were all extracted and made available given the research frameworks and philosophical lenses of a portraitist as well as a phenomenologist. In short, it is via these frameworks, where this study benefited from a semi-ethnographic stance in adjunct to phenomenology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which hence brings us one step closer in understanding the nebulous phenomenon of culinary creativity.

### Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study adds great value to existing body of knowledge through three unique avenues. First, this study has illustrated that the culinary creativity process is not one that follows a sequential and linear process (Horng & Hu, 2008, 2009; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007, 2008, 2009), but rather one that reflect relational qualities that manifests at the level of social practices (Fuels, 2018). In particular, this perspective suggests that the culinary creativity process as experienced by chefs are not bound to stages of a delineated process (e.g. Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007), but is rather one that is continuously in motion and evolves over time through incubation and continuous inspirations. The concept of creative spaces provides a context to how these relational influences occur. As this study provides a useful viewpoint on how different creative spaces connects individuals to the state of 'intimate

immensity,’ which allows one to ‘enter into a region of the purest sort of phenomenology – a phenomenology without phenomena’ (Bachelard, 1994, p. 201). The impact of a creative space was portrayed in this study to withhold several qualities that may fuel the creative process, suggesting that pastry chef’s creations are by-products of their encounters with creative spaces. In short, pastry chefs’ interaction with creative spaces provides a perspective that inspirations and creativity occurs upon spontaneous encounters during everyday practices and interaction with different spaces (Gherardi, 2012). All in all, albeit it is easier to compare the process of creativity to the likes of a stage model that complies to sequential phases and stages (Stubbart & Smalley, 1999), it however, oversimplifies the complex nature of creativity. Instead, this study offers empirical support that culinary creativity is a patient endeavor of incubation and fueled by continual inspirations, rather than one that obliges to sequential processes.

Secondly, this study enhances current literature on chefs’ occupational rhetorics particularly from the viewpoint as an artist. Originally coined by Fine (1996), occupational rhetorics refer to an individual’s identity constituted by a ‘set of images that connects one to an unambiguous work world’ (p. 91), which suggests that individuals self-construct bundles of meanings for themselves called ‘rhetorics’ to help associate themselves with different situations at work. In other words, it is a way of ‘fitting work into a meaning system’ (Fine, 1996, p. 90). This study in particular, extends what existing literature understands of pastry chefs’ artistic rhetoric, which associates individuals with the most enjoyable activities that the profession entails, providing pride and a means in what they do. Other studies have supported this view in noting that the rhetorical view of an artist ties chefs closer to the profession, boosting their satisfaction levels, and more importantly, providing them a safe haven to remain committed to the profession and their respective organizations (Robinson et al., 2014). From pastry chefs’ viewpoint, the rhetoric of an artist is however, informed by a contradictory, yet inseparable personification – the scientist. Albeit contrasting in stances, both personas have been shown to



come together harmoniously to inform pastry chefs during the creative process. More particularly, the artistic personification is informed with scientific rationalism, while the scientific personification is portrayed in artistic fashion by one's innate desire to create. While the scientific persona could arguably stand alone as a distinct rhetoric by its own, this study submits that it best fit as an interwoven trait of the artistic rhetoric.

As contemplated, *pâtisserie* creations, despite resonating as a work of art, resemble a complicated creation that accounts for the various chemical reactions and scientific procedures. The interchange between the two personifications occurs unconsciously, where one may be thinking that he/she is producing a task of pure artistry, where actually his/her mastery of scientific elements is what fuels the artistic endeavor. In other words, the engagement of culinary creativity brings out the scientist that supports the artist. This adds to existing literature and also brings to consideration that there is much interaction between the two personifications, in which there is much to consider about the science behind the making of art, and the art in the development of science. In essence, not only has this study evidently portrayed Fine's (1996) conceptualization of the artistic rhetoric in the creative experiences of the pastry chefs, but it also adds greater enrichment, as it supplies how the artistic rhetoric is interweaved with the scientific personification, which arguably could stand alone as a distinct rhetoric by its own.

Last but not least, through the delineation of the creativity process into three distinct occasions – minds of pastry chefs, sketchbooks, and actualization – this study brings today's knowledge one step closer to understand the concept of imaginative episodes and flow in relations to the culinary profession. The concept of flow is no stranger to creativity, which resembles an autotelic and intrinsically rewarding experience that occurs when a balance in challenge and skill is met (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). What this study offers as an advancement of the flow theory is that the flow state was portrayed to uncharacteristically possess a “pause button” within the space of their sketchbooks. This pause allows pastry chefs to step back from

the optimal experience and reflect on what was seemingly translated from one's subconscious, in which a punctuation is placed upon the flow experience, hence allowing one's draft of an imaginative experience to incubate within the pages of a sketchbook, only to be revisited with a fresh perspective in the future.

Pauses and punctuations, however resonate as key disruptors to the flow experience, as it deliberately puts an end to the highly desired 'optimal state' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Nonetheless, it is within the sketchbooks of pastry chefs where trails and evidence from one's imaginative episodes are documented closest to its rawest of forms. Although the "resume button" may be harder to initiate than the "pause button," it is within such documentations, where ideas in an embryonic state are allowed to incubate. And it is through a revisit to these ideas, where one could potentially reenter the initial optimal experience in full light, or diverge off into new branches of imaginative episodes. It must be stated though, that this study does not claim that the flow experience has a mystical "pause or resume button." Instead, what it humbly implies is during each interviewed pastry chef's resonant encounter with the culinary creativity phenomenon, he/she describes the fluency of his/her encounter with the flow experience closely as a punctuated incubation process during the jottings and documentation in one's sketchbook. It is through the philosophical lenses of a phenomenologist and the voice of a portraitist in which the essences of the flow experience were captured and portrayed in this manner. All in which captures the complex phenomenon of culinary creativity in a unique perspective that would otherwise fail to be recognized.

### Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, given that many scholars and practitioners alike have suggested that the industry should encourage the profession with freedom to create in order to

provides the chefs with a sense of fulfillment (Ariza-Montes et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2014), this study has uncovered several key essences that would serve useful to help chefs embrace the creative phenomenon. For one, managers and respective personnel should first and foremost provide sufficient legroom for chefs to roam outside of the kitchen space. As this study showcased that pastry chefs are more likely to find creative inspirations from spaces outside of the kitchen, managers could adopt innovative schedule arrangements, such as compressed working weeks or *flexitime* (i.e., schedules designed to specifically suit an individual's personal roster without jeopardizing the completion of necessary work tasks) (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010) to provide chefs more time to expose themselves to the outside world, potentially connecting themselves greater to the artist within.

Moreover, it has to be noted that not all pastry chefs have the opportunity to embrace one's artistic self in the most intimate way possible in producing showpieces, as organizations may perceive showpieces as lavish and excessive items. Nonetheless, managers should provide alternatives to such expressionistic tasks, such as encouraging chefs to create new and personalized garnishes for their desserts or dishes on a regular basis to allow them to have an opportunity to connect with the artistic rhetoric. As evident in this study, the engagement with culinary expressionistic tasks (i.e., showpieces) equips pastry chefs with a distinct pair of lenses, allowing them to see shapes, colors, and patterns in everyday objects. Hence, practitioners should encourage such engagement with culinary expressionistic tasks to potentially allow them to be more susceptible to creative stimuli in everyday spaces.

Furthermore, as the portraits of the Protégés suggest, it is clear that culinary artists can learn much from one another and perhaps even more than from schools, trainings, and books. Having stated, managers are encouraged to instill a culture that helps stimulate one another partly through the healthy spirit of sharing. Nonetheless, the most essential key is the need for effective communication as chefs feedback is at very essence a form creative stimulant (Horng & Hu,

2008). On top of that, managers, superiors and also culinary educators should encourage pastry chefs or students to keep and maintain creative journals, to document recipes, ideas, and techniques learned throughout their careers. As shown evidently in this study, creative journals (e.g., sketchbooks) resonated as essential artifacts near and dear to the hearts of extraordinary Malaysian pastry chefs. Not only does it serve as an important setting for play and documentation, but it also resembles an inducible object that could transpire chefs to enter the state of flow. Moreover, as this study uncovered how the scientific persona subconsciously facilitates the artistic rhetoric, practitioners should help reinforce the scientific personification by not only providing chefs the opportunities to experiment, but also supply them with trustworthy sources of information through books and professional periodicals, to help them reinforce one's scientific grasps on how food works.

Perhaps the greatest benefactor of this study would be for no other than aspiring pastry chefs who dream of participating in the prestigious World Cup. As this study portrayed the many creative experiences of pastry chefs who have reached the pinnacle of their profession as artists, it has hence, unpacked many unseen processes and stories during their engagement with their work. For example, this study has showcased how culinary artists go beyond the mere synthesis and construction of flavor and other sensorial elements, but they also invest time and creative effort in theatricalizing their products in a cinematic form. Using the various portraiture and narrative elements, this study has depicted how several outstanding pastry chefs used this to their advantage, allowing aspiring pastry chefs to extract, adopt, and apply such principles to their creation processes.

## Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

Despite unraveling some of the salient features of culinary creativity through portraiture, this study is however, not without its flaws. Several limitations are present in the study's research design. Firstly, the sample of this study is most definitely ungeneralizable to all chefs nor pastry chefs as a whole. This is because the present study is constrained within limits of nine individuals who participated in the World Pastry Cup. In addition, given that the present study purposefully selected Malaysian representatives as the sample of choice, the issue of generalizability is again in question. Nonetheless, certain values learned from this study are most definitely transferrable, as the essences and distinct stories portrayed in each pastry chef's portrait may most definitely be insightful for many others within the profession.

In addition, given that experts on this issue (e.g., Ferguson & Zukin 1998) have stated that the standing of a pastry chef is much difference in comparison to those of other culinary categories. The issue of whether the findings from this study could be transferrable to chefs from other culinary categories (e.g., hot cooking, banqueting etc.) is also of a question. Whilst this study has covered much ground on understanding how pastry chefs think and create, much care must be taken when applying to other culinary categories. Sample findings, such as the dependencies on sketchbooks, expressions through showpieces, and the interaction between pastry chefs' two distinct creative identities may only be exclusive to those of extraordinary pastry chefs. Therefore, future studies and practitioners of interests should take into full consideration of such exclusiveness before making decisions based off the findings informed by this study.

Furthermore, the measures used (questions) may potentially inhibit a thorough analysis of the results. For example, a specific question may unseeingly not be included in this study that, in retrospect, would have helped a particular issue that may emerge. If so, future studies may

nonetheless revise the current study's method in remedy of the situation. In addition, given that this study only conducted interviews at a specific point of time, this study is without a doubt subjected to the limitations of a cross-sectional study. In essence, this study only provides a snapshot of the extraordinary Malaysian pastry chef's creativity, all in which suggests that there is more to what has been discovered and reported. Moreover, despite collecting data from several data sources (i.e., interviews, sketchbooks, pictures etc.) the issue of respondents providing false or exaggerated responses may still arise as an issue. Whilst this study has taken into consideration of triangulation to improve trustworthiness in hopes to minimize this problem, this study admits to not possibly eliminate all potential flaws relevant to respondents sincerity in responses. Notwithstanding, portraiture has undergone several critiques, such as those who contemplated that the method abuses the power of the portraitist, allowing one to dictate the flow of data or stories portrayed, which brings up the issue of ethics and objectivity in unraveling a phenomenon (English, 2000). In this respect, I have engaged in several follow-up questions to ensure that my potential misinterpretations and voice as a portraitist do not steer this study's direction misleadingly. As a portraitist, framed by the lens of a phenomenologist, I stand by the beauty behind the empiricism and intuitive nature of portraiture given my constant engagement in the process of *epoche* (bracketing) alongside several steps to ensure trustworthiness.

This study at the same time, also serves as a foundation that may be branched and extended into different directions for future research endeavors. For one, more interviews with expert pastry chefs is recommended, which would most definitely bolster with richness to existing literature on the topic. Moreover, a definite opportunity is to replicate the underlying purpose and other aspects of this study across continents and countries, expanding its scope beyond Malaysia and also the context of the World Pastry Cup. In addition, future studies could increase and diversify their samples to other pastry chefs from different backgrounds, or even other culinary categories (e.g., butchery chefs, catering chefs, banqueting chefs etc.).

Comparisons between different culinary categories, age groups, geographical stances, as well as many other demographic factors may yield interesting implications for both practice and literature. Moreover, this study's purpose could also be adapted for other domains of in which creativity manifests in, such as science and other forms of art (e.g., painting and music). Given that creativity in the context of a kitchen also resonates as team effort and derivatives from a creative legacy (see Portrait #6), future studies could incorporate elements of this study's inquiry in investigating how creativity manifests in creative teams and collaborations.

Given that artistic creativity must be defined by specific parameters set by its respective domain (in which expert judges and gatekeepers are involved in the determinacy of a creative idea) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), this study benefited through a fertile field by exploring those who represented Malaysia in one of gastronomy's most prestigious international competitions in which creativity and culinary artistry are known to be celebrated for (Coupe du Monde Pâtisserie, 2017). Hence, future studies are encouraged to dig deep into the many renowned culinary competitions such as the *Bocuse d'Or*, *World Chocolate Masters*, or *Mondial des arts Sucrés*, as these competitive settings are known for their impartiality through the invitation of a diverse panel of international judges who are not only known for their contributions to gastronomy, but also their excellence in culinary artistry (Ferguson, 2010). Moreover, given that this study found that the three of the Malaysia's youngest representatives of the World Pastry Cup varied in terms of creative experiences (see Portrait #7-9), it is recommended that this study tackle these nuances head on. In particular, future studies are recommended to perhaps look into the creative experiences of apprentices to those chefs in their primes. Junior level competitions, such as the Junior World Pastry Cup, which lives by the same standards and rules may prove as a fruitful field to exploit the aforementioned.

To finish, this study hopes to encourage future studies to embrace non-conventional approaches (i.e., phenomenological and portraiture) in hospitality research, In essence, I stand by

Stierand and Dörfler's (2012) words in suggesting that future researchers should "critically re-think their entrenched fear of such approaches" (p. 956), as it may yield unique interpretations that are not accessible through (post)positivism perspectives.



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## APPENDICES

## INSIDE THE MINDS OF MALAYSIAN WORLD PASTRY CHEFS

### Interview Questions

1. Who or what inspired you to become a chef?
2. What role does creativity play in your work as a chef?
  - Do you think it is true/same for the culinary profession in general? Why and how so?
3. Can you think of a particular occasion, where you felt creative with a particular creation?
  - Can you describe for me in as much detail as possible everything that happened, almost as if you're reliving it again?
  - How did the process feel like?
  - What analogy or metaphor would you use to describe it?
  - Could you think of another experience?
4. Is there a place for “play” in the culinary experience where you have the liberty to exercise your imagination?
  - If so, can you describe it for me?
5. I would like for you to imagine the ideal conditions for your best creative performance, could you describe that for me?
6. What would be your signature culinary creation?
  - Could you describe for me the process of that creation?
7. What factors influence you when creating?
8. In your opinion, what makes a culinary creation innovative?
  - Does your view differ from those of your customers and critics? Why and how so?
9. What makes your creation different from other chefs?
10. In your view, in what ways is “culinary creativity” similar or distinct from other forms of artistic creativity (e.g., painting, dancing, music)?
11. How does your environment play a role in your creative process?
12. What if any, are there barriers to the creative experience?
  - What about your own experience? Have you encountered any barriers to the creative experience?

## Appendix B: IRB Approval

### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Friday, December 8, 2017  
IRB Application No HE1772  
Proposal Title: Inside the Mind of a Chef: The Phenomenology of Chefs' Artistic Creativity

Reviewed and  
Processed as: Exempt

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 12/7/2020**

Principal  
Investigator(s):

Kai-Sean Lee	Denise Blum	Stacy Tomas
	206 Willard	
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078
Li Miao		
201 HESW		
Stillwater, OK 74078		

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.


☐ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Kai-Sean Lee

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: INSIDE THE MINDS OF MALAYSIAN WORLD PASTRY CHEFS:  
PORTRAITS OF CULINARY CREATIVITY

Major Field: Hospitality Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Hospitality Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Culinary Management at Sunway University, Selangor, Malaysia in 2016.

Experience:

Chef Instructor at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Oklahoma State University

Graduate Assistant at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Oklahoma State University

Barista (Internship) at The BIG GROUP SDN BHD in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Barista (Internship) at Espressamente Illy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Pastry Chef (Internship) at Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia